

The Divine Cowherd & The Divine Milk-Maids

DELUXE EDITION

Kripal Singh

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The Divine Cowherd AND The Divine Milk-Maids

(Being the Love-play between Lord Sri Krishna and
the *Gopikas—Maha Ras.*)

FOREWORD

This Love-play of Lord Sri Krishna embodies the essence of *Bhakti* (true devotion). The critic or detractor of the Lord's character generally forgets that in His Love-play, as also in all His doings, Sri Krishna appears in the role of the Supreme Being. Let him open the pages of *Srimad Bhagwat Purana* and other scriptures, and he will find therein sufficient inspiration to discover for himself who Sri Krishna really is, and what this name of His connotes. He is the Lurer of our hearts and nothing better illustrates this truth than this Love-play. Let the impartial reader, whose judgment is not obsessed with any previous notions of proprieties or improprieties, go through these pages from first to last, and then form an opinion of the fundamental truths this Love-play is intended to teach. Once you take Sri Krishna to be a human being, the whole play becomes meaningless for you. What is in a name? Really He is Nameless, all His names being of our own choosing. Let the tongue of blasphemy be hushed. Make Sri Krishna your idol, your Beloved, your Lord, superimpose His judgment upon yours and then see whether His Love-play does not electrify your soul.

The present account is based on the original

chapters 29 to 33 of the tenth book of the *Srimad Bhag-wal* and the various commentaries thereon, notably of Mukhyaji Raghunathji Krishnalalji (1894 Edition). I have consulted several commentaries. There is so much common in them that it is difficult for any person to say which is the original source, from which they have all freely borrowed. Their source of inspiration is, of course, the current Vaishnava literature, chiefly of Gourya Sampradaya, coupled assuredly with a few *Puranas*. Nevertheless, for such of their material as I have laid under contribution in compiling this cursory sketch, I am deeply grateful to their authors. The skeleton is theirs. I have only tried in a few places to fill in the gaps and the outlines, and to fit in the interpretations, which would, perhaps, bear the scrutiny of modern critics and which, in my opinion, do not go against the spirit of the Love-play. For the English reader the play required a fresh sifting. This has been done in the light of the inspiration, vouchsafed to me by my Beloved Lord. Yet some allowance should be made for the difficulties of writing in a foreign language, of which the present writer can by no means claim to be a master.

The writer is also greatly indebted to the actors, whose lucid exposition and realistic performances have been very much helpful to him in collating the material herein embodied. God bless them all.

Brindaban,
7th August, 1918.

Kripal Singh

The Ecstatic Love-Play

Chapter First

The Lord's Love-play is a fascinating topic for study. It is only another name for Sri Krishna's *Maha Ras*, and the story cannot be better described than in the words of the various commentaries, that have enlarged on the theme of the *Srimad Bhagwat Purana*. Don Cupid, the great Tempter, as the story runs, is a bit proud that he has laid prostrate the whole world, including Brahma, Mahadeva and Indra. Only he has yet to court a fight with *Vishnu* and see if he can vanquish Him, too. Success makes one proud. The vainglorious conqueror is haughtily treading his way when he comes across the old, grey-bearded Narada (the awakened conscience of aspirants for the Lord), to whom he throws out the challenge to fight. The awakened soul, pleading its inability to accept the challenge, points out to its sheet-anchor, Lord Sri Krishna of Brindaban, great among the greatest of the *Yadavas* (ascetics who have assuredly restrained their senses from going astray), matchless in strength and beauty, with whom he should contend for mastery. The Tempter, in his arrogance, proceeds thither. No doubt all this is only an allegory with a deep spiritual meaning. Lord Sri Krishna is the great God Himself and the place of His residence is *Braja Mandal*, which is the counterpart of Brindaban, the great Fortress of Love, in which the lovers of God, discarding all carnal enjoyments, have taken refuge.

To carry the allegory a step further: The mind

is perplexed 'by the entanglements of poetry¹, surrounding the fortress of love, in the same way as clothing is torn into shreds by being caught in the network of thorny bushes, surrounding a fortress. This fortress has its encircling ditch of purest principles,² its ramparts³ of six philosophies,⁴ its turrets,⁵ of eighteen *Puranas*; the four *Vedas* constitute its four towers at the corners; *Vaishnav Shastras* are the guns, (cannon) mounted on the towers; *Hari Bhaktas* (Lord's Devotees) are the gunners⁶. Evil-minded persons,⁷ atheists,⁸ faithless⁹ people and critics¹⁰ are the assailants of this fortress, who take to flight when bombs of solid and clear-sighted reasoning¹¹ are fired at them from the mouths of cannon (*Vaishnav Shastras*) by *Hari Bhakta* gunners. God's grace¹² and reverence¹³, for holy persons are the two gates of this fortress, merits and demerits¹⁴ are the gatekeepers, by whom men of merits are given free access and men of demerits turned out. The residents¹⁵ of this fortress, are the ardent devotees and humble adherents of Lord Krishna.¹⁶ The fortress contains the imperial palaces, too. These are the sacred, secluded mansions¹⁷ of the Arch-lover of the Universe, who is no other than Sri Krishna Himself. He is the Lord and

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- 1 (सामान्य कविताई की झाड़ी) 2 (शुद्ध सत्त्व) 3 (परिकोटा)
 4(षट् शास्त्र) 5(बुरज) 6(गोलन्दाज) 7(दूषित जन) 8(नास्तिक)
 9 (विमुख) 10 (निंदक) 11 (युक्ति) 12 (श्री कृष्ण कृपा)
 13 (साधु भक्ति) 14 (पुण्य पाप) 15 (प्रजा) 16 (श्री कृष्ण
 प्रेमातुरी प्रजा) 17 (निकुंज महल)

His feminine counterpart, Sri Radha, Lady of the palace.¹⁸ For, "the Deity is not masculine alone : He is both masculine and feminine". Here the watch-cry of the palace-guards (*Srimad Bhagwat Gita* and the eleventh book of the *Srimad Bhagwat Purana*, being the chief constables)¹⁹ is, "Renounce all other paths of deliverance and take refuge in Me. I will deliver thee!"

On his way to Braja the blustering bully, Cupid, comes across Sri Krishna, who is returning from the field with his flock of cattle (the flock of willing, disciplined souls). His comrades²⁰ and His brother, *Balram*, (the god of love divine) are with him. It is evening time. The *Gopis* go up on the balconies and big terraces to catch a glimpse of Lord Sri-Krishna's side-glance,

'With a smile that glow'd.
Celestial rosy red, love's proper hue',
at one of the *Gopis*, which made the Devil whisper-
aloud, 'Verily, my big fight is already won. It re-
quires little effort to vanquish Sri Krishna'. At night
the Tempter approaches Sri Krishna in His sleeping
apartment²¹, and, after making obeisance to Him,
takes his seat. Now bowing one's head before an
adversary does not betoken at all that the swaggerer
would succeed in his mission, or come out successful
in his fight with the Lord. When he explains the

18 राजा-रानी; पुंस्त्री 19 (सर्व धर्मान्पतियज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज)

20 (मखा मंडली) 21 (चित्र सारी)

object of his mission, Sri Krishna asks him whether he would prefer playing the part of a beseiging enemy or fight with him a pitched battle in the open. Clearing the metaphor, the great Lord says: ' If I were to mix and sport²² among millions of *Gopis* and yet not allow a single debasing thought to enter my heart and otherwise remain heart-whole, the victory would be mine, that would be a sort of free and open fight with thee. But if I were to turn a recluse and seek the solitude of a forest or a mountain-cave, and even with closed eyes My mind were to get the better of me and be troubled with thoughts of women folk, then the victory would be thine, that would be a sort of bush or fortress warfare".

The lordly warrior, Sri Krishna, preferring to fight in the open, arranges for this purpose a huge *Ras Mandal* (Joyous Festival) in the pleasure-grounds of Brindaban.

Now *Ras* is of two sorts: *Nitya Ras*, the one in which the Lord and His devotees, in fact, the whole of His creation, is perpetually engaged; and *Maha Ras*, the great Love-feast of the soul, which forms the subject-matter of this sketch. Some classify *Ras* as *Mansik*²³ *Vachik*²⁴ and *Kayik*²⁵, according to the progressive change it works in our *thoughts, words* and *deeds*, in their relation to our Beloved Lord. The whole topic is dealt with in the five chapters²⁶ of the

22 (बिहार) 23 (मानसिक) 24 (वाचिक) 25 (कायिक)
 26 (अध्याय)

Srimad Bhagwat Purana. The first chapter treats of *Mansik*, the next two of *Vachik* and the last two of *Kayik Ras*. When the heart is full of godliness, then is the time for joyous communion with the Lord.²⁷ Unless the maiden (bouncing, chaste) hearts beat in unison, no spiritual communion is possible. It is, therefore, that the Lord's perpetual youth^b (an innocent, guileless life, so full of sunshine) imparts a touch of its abounding warmth to our own soul. The earlier childhood and the declining old age, which correspond to the first and the last part of a season, yield the palm to the budding youth that is the middle part, when the season is in its prime. Hence the propriety of the middle of autumn and, for the matter of that, of middle of youth (to wit, the youthful condition of our soul) for participation in the joyous, spiritual feast.

The five chapters are meant to meet the onslaught of the five arrows of the Great Tempter, which do their nefarious work through the five senses. The relevancy of the numerical figure 'five' becomes further patent when we look at our physical frame. Five elements enter into its composition and it has five important sheaths²⁹ and the five chapters are so many weapons meant to control them. Again the five chapters (*Ras Panchadhyaye*) are the very soul of the *Srimad Bhagwat Purana*, in the same way as the five *Pranas* are of our body. Then, again,

there are so many *Shastras* (sacred books) and *Sampradayas* (sects) at variance with one another. Some say that God is Personal, others say that He is Impersonal. The *Dwaita*, the *Adwaita* the *Vachishta Adwaita* of Ramanuja Swami, the *Shudha Adwaita*, Vishnu Swami Sampradaya, the *Dwaita-Adwaita* of Nimbarak Acharya—all these and many more seek in vain the settlement of their differences in the court of *Karma Kanda* (Action), *Gyan Kanda* (Knowledge) and *Upasana Kanda* (Devotional prayer). The dispute is, therefore, brought to the supreme court of the *Panchas* (the selected five), as represented by the five chapters. The essence of the decision of these five arbitrators is embodied in a single word of four letters *viz*, Love³⁰. Leave off all quarrels, they say, seek shelter among the shady bowers of Brindaban, the home of Love, and look upon *Sri Radha-Govind* as your All-in-all, do homage to them alone, and carry out their behests for the sole benefit of humanity.

The *Bhajwat Purana* is considered by the devout to be a living representation of Sri Krishna. The first two Parts are, so to say, the feet, the third and the fourth are the legs, the fifth is the loin, the sixth is the navel, the seventh and the eighth are the arms, the ninth is the breast, the tenth is the heart, the eleventh is the mouth and the twelfth is the forehead of the Lord. The heart being the seat of

the *Prana* (life-breath), the five chapters are, as it were, the five *Pranas* (five-fold breath) and, therefore, embodied in the tenth Part, i.e., the heart of the book.

The *Gopis* are the emblems or an embodiment of love³¹ and are classified as *Nitya Sidha* (perfected souls who are ever the Lord's associates, united with Him in eternal bond) and *Sadhana Siddha* (those who have attained to fellowship with the Lord after protracted self-discipline and devotion). The *Sadhan Sidha Gonis*, again, are subdivided into *Ayauhdik*,³² and *Yauhdik*,³³ according as their self-mastery is complete or incomplete. Some classify them as *Shruti roop*,³⁴ *Deva Kanya*,³⁵ *Rishi Kanya*³⁶ and *Gopa Kanya*,³⁷ according to the spiritual stock, which is their heritage. The first in order is the Inspired Word, which is synonymous with the head, God, the second are the lesser divinities; the third the saints and seers and the fourth are the indigenous stock of *Braja*. This classification, of course, takes cognisance of the entire ascending scale of human evolution.

Dogmatic assertions apart, pray, who are the *Gopis*? Surely they are souls, who have consecrated their everything, even their soul, to the service of their Beloved Lord and who consider Him as their All-in-all. At the very thought of separation from Him their heart breaks in twain, as if struck by an arrow, a heart that opens out lotus-

31 गोपी प्रेम की ध्वनी, 32 अयोधिकी 33 यौधकी, 34 श्रुति रूप,
35 देव कन्या, 36 ऋषि कन्या, 37 गोप कन्या,

like when Sri Krishna is with them. And who is Sri Krishna? None but the Great Lord, the Lurer of our hearts.

For baffling the efforts of the Tempter, who is ever trying to get the upper hand over us, the Lord enacts a Love-play.

First of all, the Lord requisitions the services of His maid-servant, the *Yoga Maya*, the Lady of the Toilet,³⁸ the *Prasadhika* of our soul. Some call her Toilet personified.³⁹ But this maid-servant is in fact *Maha Vidya* (Spiritual, albeit, Divine Energy personified). The soul in its onward march gets into touch with the Lord through the instrumentality of *Maha Vidya*. There is a difference between *Maya* and *Yoga Maya*. *Maya* (*avidya*, ignorance) appertains to the outer world and its manifestation, enamoured of which man turns away from the Lord and does not see the great mystery of His being working therein. *Yoga Maya* is a beneficent power, inherent in the Lord, which He exercises for the good of His devotees. When Vasudeva,⁴⁰ under the Lord's inspiration, defies Kansa and his wardens, the Lord's *Yoga Maya* can be said to be at his back, but when *Duryodhana*, in his conceit, underrates the strength of Sri Krishna and so does not know that He is the Supreme Being Himself, he can be said to be merely blinded by *Maya*.

Brinda Devi, the presiding Goddess of Brindaban

(the Fortress of Love) also places herself at the service of the Lord and promptly arranges all that is needed for the coming spiritual celebration. By the way, seeing that Brinda signifies *Tulsi* (Love incomparable), it should be noted here that Brinda Devi and *Yoga Maya* are evidently one and the same. For, Divine Energy is only another name for Love *par excellence*.

The Play Begins

It is the night of *Pooran Mashi* (Full Moon). The full moon, that great ideal prince among the shining orbs of heaven, has just risen to illumine the firmament. As the waiting spouse, long separated from her beloved, rejoices at his home-coming and her face brightens up as her lord applies a mark of saffron to her forehead, even so the face of the eastern sky is all red and radiant on receiving the comforting rays of the Great Luminary, the Full Moon. Is it really a moon, or a mirror or a butter-ball, or a bouquet of flowers, or a toilet-box, or a lump of sugar, or thick curds, or silver, or a dish of sweetmeats? No, it is, verily, an illuminating lamp of the soul, lighted by the Oversoul, for participating in the Joyous Feast, though intoxicated souls (joyous aspirants, inebriated with love) can hardly distinguish between analogous things.

As the night advances, the street traffic stops and the whole world goes to sleep. Sri Krishna slowly gets out of His reposeful bed, quietly opens the

window of His apartment, facing the East, (even the glowing firmament of our soul), and leaps into His Flower-Garden, yea, — the garden full of blossoms, prepared by us for His reception. After a little circling motion the Lord, so to say, is up on His legs and He traverses one after the other the narrow foot-paths (the alleys of our soul), leading through beds of roses,⁴¹ *Jookhi*⁴² (*Jasminum Auriculatum*), *Juthi*⁴³ (yellow Jasmine) and avenues of *Mauleri*⁴⁴ (*Mimusops Elengi*) and again through beds of saffron⁴⁵ and thickly wooded groves and shrubberies (the ground being all fragrant and beautiful to look at). Clenching His upper garment on the right and the left, He frequently bends to save the bent part of His crown⁴⁶ from being entangled among the creepers and the foliage of trees (there being so many meshes within meshes). And, waving His stick, the playful Lord⁴⁷ proceeds at a leisurely pace to a place near *Bansi But*.⁴⁸ On the banks of the Jamuna (the spiritual plane, free from the dross of this world, where His songs are being sung and the torrent of sweet nectar, aye, Love Divine, flows in great abundance) He takes His stand under a shady creeper, that over-shadows His appearance! The beautiful moon makes the *Kamodini*⁴⁹ (a variety of white lotus), smile and open its petals (the heart being likened unto a lotus). Her loveliness is only equalled by that of His sister,

41 स्थल कमल, 42 जूही, 43 जूथी, हेमपुष्पिका, 44 मौलसिरी, मवशाली, 45 केशर, 46 मोर-मुकुट, 47 राम चिह्नारी, नट नागर, 48 बंशीवट, 49 कमोदिनी,

Lakshmi,⁵⁰ (who aspires to have a seat near the Lord's blessed feet), even that of *Sri Radha* (who aspires to adore and wed the Lord), as well as her counterpart, the *Gopis* (divine milk-maids, even the monopolists of love divine).

The moon is shedding His genial rays on the fair bosom of *Sri Brindaban* (the abode of Love *par excellence*), where the birds divine chirp and sing in sweet accents the name of the ever lovely exalted Radha, whose domain extends over the whole of Brindaban, where Love is the law. The new saffron-like appearance of the moon, that has imparted a fine orange colour—so soothing and comforting to the whole landscape,—sets the heart aglow; and Sri Krishna, whose heart is all gold⁵¹, gets ready with the heart's vesture⁵² for the reception of His flute⁵³, representing the voice of His flawless, pure conscience—even the, Flute, that has threefold qualities, is known as *Nandani* (rapturous), *Akarshini*⁵⁴ (alluring) and *Sanmohini*⁵⁵ (winsome). The alluring flute is the Lord's life-long friend and bed-companion and He addresses it thus:

“Beloved Flute-pipe, I have served thee all my life. My hands serve as thy velvet cushion; thou resteth on my lips, whose nectar sustains thee. My fingers, with which I close thy holes, shampoo thee; the motion of the ringlets, hanging on my face and my eyelids, fans thee. One who is served becomes

50 लक्ष्मी, रमा, 51 पीत, 52 पीताम्बर, 53 बंशी 54 नन्दनी,

55 आकर्षिणी,

56 संमोहिनी,

indebted to the server and willingly obeys him. I also expect the same willing obedience of thee". Apparently not considering itself deserving of this compliment, the flute responds in its own accents, "Lord I am Thy maid-servant, ever at Thy-service. Do command me to do as it pleaseth Thee. I shall, indeed, consider myself blessed, if this hollow body of mine can serve some useful purpose."

The Lord says⁵⁷ :-

"My request to thee is that tonight--the blessed night of *Sharad* (that defies all impure thoughts)—do thou emit a heavenly, melodious sound so that the *Gopi* souls, in sympathy with sound, may irresistibly be drawn to this place—aye, the *Gopi* souls, who would not care to look at me when I pass by them, even they might lose all patience and hasten to this spot. But, pray, don't trouble the aged and the younglings. Do thou enter, however, into the hearts of the budding maids⁵⁸ by the side-door of their ears and fetch me the jewel of their heart"⁵⁹.

With the aid of His magic *mantras*, uttered through the flute, the Lord summons *Gopis* by their names⁶⁰ :

(1) Blooming belle, (2) Lucky, (3) Restless (4) and (5) Heavenly lights, after the names of lunar mansions;

57 सुनि बंशी मेरी बिनय, शरद रैन सुखदैनि ।

धुनि बंशी में मोहिकै, मोहि लाउ मृग नैनि ॥

58 नव किशोरी, 59 मन माणिक्य,

60 हे श्यामे सुभगे, स्वभावचपले, चित्र विशाखे प्रिय हे ।

(6) Flood of light, i.e., charmingly beautiful (7) Brunette (8) Bonny (9) Highly blessed, (10) Blessed, (11) Evergreen, Champak and (12) Gold-streaked.

Excepting the old and the cripple, (that is, spiritually lame and feeble), who became deaf to the sound of the flute, all come hurry-scurry, drawn, one should say, like a puppet⁶¹. As one, who is robbed, runs quickly after the robber, even so the *Gopis* posthaste follow the song of the flute, that has robbed them of their inner treasure,—even the treasure of modesty, patience and discrimination,⁶² coupled with the jewel of their hearts.

The Lord is, indeed, the Arch-lover and Lurer of human hearts.⁶³

No one has time to call her neighbour. The infatuated mind of the *Gopis*, swayed as it is by divine inspiration, would not allow them to do that. As the onrush of waters in a huge flood overflows the banks and bridges of a stream and cuts its way through to the ocean, so the overflowing love of the *Gopis* for One, Who is the nearest and dearest to them, enables them to break through all social barriers and merge themselves in the ocean of His love, not withstanding all obstructions. As the *Gopis* move apace, their ear-

चन्द्रावली श्यामलच ललित हे हुंगमदे रसै ॥

हे भद्रे सुखदे च चपक हवे, हे स्वर्ण रेखे शुभ अन्याय

भम वल्लभा वृजपुरे तास्तूर्णमागच्छाम ॥

61 काठ की पुतरी, 62 लज्जा धैर्य, विवेक, 63 चौरजार शिखामणि,

pendants⁶⁴ (being the outer symbol of, ⁶⁵mental organs), not wishing, perhaps, to lag behind them (the mind being more eager than the flesh) move all the faster, the one vies with the other in moving ahead and, goaded by a spirit of rivalry, the *Gopis*, too, run as fast as their legs can carry them. The enchanting song of the flute makes the *Gopis* self-forgetful. One who is milking her cow throws away the milk-pail, another leaves the milk boiling hot on the fire and does not take the precaution to take down the pan, a third thrusts aside the youngsters she is feeding, a fourth turns her back on her husband whom she is serving with meals, a fifth leaves her supper half-finished, a sixth gives up plastering the ground-floor of her house and, before going, does not care to wash her hands that are spoiled with cowdung plaster, a seventh, intoxicated with love, goes singing and dancing, an eighth consigns her *sandal-wood paste, and complexion powder⁶⁶, to the dust and, abandoning all worldly desires, quits her home with the Lord's name on her lips, a ninth has hardly had time to apply collyrium⁶⁷ to one of her eyes before she leaves in obedience to the Lord's call, only wishing that the Lord would fill the second with His own complexion and thereby make the eyes look far more pretty than they would otherwise be, a tenth has one of her fingers besmeared with *Kajal* (collyrium) and raises it aloft

64 कर्ण कुंडल, 65 अन्तःकरण 66 अत्रदना, 67 काजर

* Turmeric paste used by ladies, more often new brides, for their toilet

only to show that the Lord's invisibility (dark appearance), has brought about her ruin, an eleventh dresses herself improperly, she forgets that one foot of her's, unlike the other, is unadorned with foot-ornament; a twelfth has her foot-ornaments adorning her hands and her hand-ornaments adorning her feet, a thirteenth has her necklace twisted round her loin and her loin-ornament suspended round her neck, a fourteenth is using her gown for her head-dress and *vice versa*, so on and so forth.

Fancies and fashions play their part only as long as the heart is not saturated with love for the Lord. Genuine love⁶⁸ does not stand in need of any outward ornamentation. Moreover, the Lord Himself sets the wrong things right and draws His loved ones to Himself, not minding their idiosyncracies and shortcomings. He only looks to the 'naked' heart of His devotees. Things likely to have bad results,⁶⁹ if unknowingly done for His sake, get righted in no time, but seemingly right things, when done in direct opposition to His own will, never produce good results.

In short, the sound of the flute created great commotion in Braja, to wit, the circle of the Lord's beloved devotees, who are not subject to baser impulses. *

69 उल्टे काम

* कवितः—

एक उठी क्षैरी, एक भूल गई पौरी, एक राख मरि कौरी ।

सुध रही ना तन में ॥

एक खुले बार, एक झतियनि उधार, एक भूषण उतार ।

The *Gopis* turned out of their homes in their thousands. Whose soul *Govind* (the Beloved Lord of one's own conscience) has robbed, how can she stay behind and who can dissuade her from going? When in the ordinary affairs of the world we see that people become mad after worldly desires, it is no wonder then that the *Gopis*, who were truly inebriated with God's Love, behaved in this way. Take an illustration—A frail woman, whose all-engrossing thoughts are centred in her sweetheart, passes by. In her forgetful mood she rubs shoulder with the so-called *Nimazi*. The latter, whose prayer is at best superficial, gets angry. The woman truly retorts ⁷⁰, "My wise friend! my weak mind being absorbed in one who is but a man, I did not notice thee! Thy mind, it seems, was not absorbed at all

चली दामिनी ज्यों घन में ॥

एक उज्यारी, गोपीनाथ ने निहारो, एक भई बोरी, डोले प्रेम के लभंग में
उधम भयो है घड़ी, चार ब्रज मण्डल में ।

बांसुरी बजाय कान्हे, काज वृन्दावन में ॥

बाजी घर आई, बाजी देखन को धाई ।

बाजी मुरझाई, नाम सुनि गिरिधर की ॥

बाजी हंसि बोलें, बाजी करत कलीलें ।

बाजी संग लागी डोले, सुध सब बिसार घर की ॥

बाजी न धरें धीर, बाजी न सम्हारें चीर ।

बाजीन के उठे पीर, दावानल भरके ॥

बाजी कहें बाजी, बाजी (कहें) कहाँ बाजी ।

बाजी कहें बाजी है बांसुरी, सांभर सुघर की (सुघड़)

कौरी=कबरी; जूड़ा=केश वेश (braid of hair)

70 दोहा: नर रायो जान्यो न तू, राच्यो किंतु सुजान ?

पढ़ि कुरान बौरा भयो, राच्यो ना रहमान ॥

in Thy Lord, aye, a repetition of the verses of the Quran has only turned thy head but thy heart is still far removed from the Lord. Had it been otherwise, thou would'st not have noticed me, in the same way as I did not notice thee." They, whose ideal is not God but Mammon, be they husbands, parents, brothers or other relatives, prove so many stumbling-blocks, in the way of those who tread the Lord's path. And it is they who dissuade the *Gopis*. But the *Gopis* do not care for them at all, nor do false thoughts of modesty or worldly fears disturb their mind in going the Lord's way, the path they have chosen for themselves. Breaking all worldly ties, that stand in their way, spurning all worldly attachments and pleasures, the ardent *Gopi* souls, no sooner they hear the call than they hurry to the Lord's blessed feet. It is not a matter of surprise. Every person, whose affections are centred in the Lord, does the same. The holy Ganges, as it rises in the hills, flows on and, in spite of huge boulders obstructing its path, ultimately joins the ocean, because the ocean is its goal. Similarly, the *Gopis*, Ganges-like, merge themselves in the Lord, Sri Krishna, who is an ocean of bliss and their life's goal. As they go their way, worldly persons, be they one's own husband, wife or children or others, etc., who resemble so many boulders, obstruct their path, but they river-like rush headlong, overcoming all obstructions, the more so because the love of the *Gopis* for their Lord Sri Krishna is not earthly but something ethereal, compounded of something heavenly and spiritual, that has not the least touch of sensuousness or sensualism in it. The

ocean of Bliss is far more deep, and diving into it is far more risky than any similar adventure in any ocean on the surface of the earth. Yet the deep ocean is not without its pearls of great price. In jewelled pearl-set garments, taken, so to say, from His own person, the Lord, dresses the humble pearl-fishers of His ocean of bliss. He, who would fathom the depth of the ocean, has to be careful lest he be drowned. Once drowned the man can't take himself out. The persons, drowned in the ocean of bliss, share the same fate. A few there are among the *Gopi* souls who, while venturing out in response to the dulcet notes of the flute, find the exit door of their house locked as it were from the outside against them by their relations. They have no recourse left but to sit down in prayer in a corner of their house and meditate on the One, whom their hearts adore. It may be that their hearts are profoundly stirred by the thought of the coming blissful devotion-play of the Lord. Perhaps, they are too much absorbed in realizing with their mind's eye the Lord, Sri Krishna, whom they can not see face to face. May be that love is quickened when one does not see his beloved and sits down with closed eyes; or how to be with and near Sri Krishna, is the problem they are solving. Whatever be the reason there they are, lost in meditation, unmoved, undisturbed, with their eyes shut on all the physical phenomena, the only cry on their lips being:

“O Friend, Destroyer of sorrows, treasure-house of

Brindaban, Thou hast been showering happiness all round since generations and time immemorial."

Lost in contemplation the *Gopis* ejaculate, "Beloved! we have been prevented from seeing Thee face to face. Our heart Thou hast blessed with Thy vision and it shall continue to bear Thy image and Thy company till eternity."

An intense yearning to meet their Beloved Lord fires the souls of these *Gopis* and if there is any drossness still lurking in their hearts, it is all consumed by the fire of enthusiasm, created by their longing. Drossness all gone, its earthly receptacle, the physical tenement, ⁷² also drops off:—

A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
 "fretted the pygmy - body to decay,
 And o'er- inform'd the tenement of clay."

When the call from above is heard and the soul is prevented from responding to that call, it can no longer remain enchained to the body and go it must to the thrice-blessed feet of the Lord. After all, of what use to a bride is her body with all its comeliness, ⁷³, grace ⁷⁴ and cleverness ⁷⁵ if the supreme goal of her happiness recedes from her view and if she can not be of service to One, whom she adores the most? Some take it all to mean that one's physical

जन्मातरऽपि त्वत्प्रेयसो भूयासमनन्तकाले ॥

72 गुणमय देहं, *(Lit: Physical body endowed with qualities)

73 सौंदर्य, 74 माधुर्य 75 चातुर्य

body, though cribbed and confined, does not hinder his ardent soul at all from communion with the Lord. Others interpret it in a different light and say, that the abandonment of the world on the part of *Gopi* souls means only the abandonment of those who obstruct their onward path. In whatever light we take it, it is a spiritual truism that worldly impediments can not hinder a soul from uniting with the Lord; and the world and all its temptations can not conquer the spirit of those who are bent upon leading a godly life. Though in the world, yet their spirit rises above it and their heroic soul never yields to the troublesome impediments that surround its Godward path. The questioner may say that all this looks very strange to those who do not know the nature of Brahma, yet own Him as their best Beloved, their own True Husband and abandon for His sake the world and its allurements! The question is puerile. It is the heart's longing, the worship that counts, and not outward expressions and intentions in those matters. The Lord acts according to the law of His being and does not take into account human frailties and human modes of addressing Him. Look at the mythological episode, narrated in the scriptures, Shishupal is accustomed from his very childhood to abusing Sri Krishna. He is the spoilt child of his parents, who are well disposed towards the Lord, God does not abandon the parents for the child's sake. Albeit the child, to wit, the parents' own in-born frailty ⁷⁶, is made to appear God-like ⁷⁷. This is

what is meant by obtaining *salvation. When saints and seers, who follow the Lord's path, act according to the law of their nature, why should not God? Or let us take another illustration: A scorpion is being washed away by the dashing currents. Very likely it will be drowned but for an act of charity on the part of a *Mahatma*, who tries to take it out. He is nevertheless stung by the scorpion. Overtaken by nemesis the scorpion again gets into deep water. The *Mahatma* makes a second and yet a third attempt to save the guileless, erring creature. In so doing he is stung each time by the scorpion. The *Mahatma* would be false to his nature if he were to let the scorpion alone and not try to save it. The scorpion acts guilelessly according to the law of its being and the *Mahatma* does not mind being so often stung by him. But he would not on that account give up the attempt to save the scorpion. Such is also the case with God. Save He must, even inveterate sinners (scorpions), between whom and the *Gopis* there is a world of difference. When He does not forget the erring souls and they, in due course, obtain salvation, why should the Lord forget His chosen and dear ones, even the *Gopis*, who do not realise His nature and yet dote on Him? Let one be guileless, then, if he scorpion-like unwittingly errs, God will pardon him and, setting right his mistakes, will guide him heavenward.

Leaving aside intense, loving souls like *Kubja* and

* सारूप्य मोक्ष (Lit: Similarly)

the *Gopis*, truth-loving souls like Yudhistar, and good-natured Nanda and Vasudeva, who behave towards the Lord as fond parents do towards their children, even they who nurse Shishupal and Kansa in their breast, only if their thoughts, without any artificiality about them, are *naturally* centred in the Lord, their regeneration through the very exhaustion of their superimposed evil is inevitable.

The Eternal God can not be properly defined. The Impersonal God, whenever He so chooses, becomes Personal for the good of His creatures, and to this one fact alone the devotees attribute the advent in spirit of the Lord, Sri Krishna, in this world. But mythological conception apart, He stands, call Him Fire⁷⁸ or Supreme Light personified, if you please, in the relation of a person to individual souls who are spiritually advanced enough; in the silent chamber of whose pure heart He at times speaks in no uncertain terms the words of supreme love and wisdom, that are so universal in their application. Kubja bent low, yet her mind perched on High and the Beautiful, she heard of the incomparable beauty of Sri Krishna. To her, He is a paragon of beauty, there being none like Him in the universe. An intense longing to see Him continues to consume her soul till the omniscient Lord Himself comes and gratifies her wishes. She is carrying sandal paste,⁹ for Kansa

78 प्रेम अग्नि,

79 गोशीर्षक (Amarkosh 2-6-131) Mark the beautiful significians of the term.

and not for Sri Krishna, yet when the Lord accosts her she willingly offers the *Chandan* she has in her hand, not that she takes Him for an *Ishwar*, but because He is a person to be adored and not to be refused. The Lord appears to her as such and lo! the Lord made her there and then the fairest of the fair! This one incident conveys a beautiful idea, with the Lord's grace your soul and along with it your appearance, inasmuch as it is the outward reflection of your soul, undergoes a transformation, corresponding to the thoughts that sway your mind in your attitude towards the Lord. Kubja's crooked back (that is whatever is 'crooked' in her) is straightened and from a crony she is transformed into a belle. Crookedness is bound to give place to uprightness, for such is the Divine Law that Lord Sri Krishna's advent so forcibly proclaims. Not by merits,⁸⁰ not by⁸¹ austerities, not by self-sacrifice alone is the Lord pleased. The Lord's ways are curious. Who knows what pleaseth Him and what pleaseth Him not?

In addressing Parikhshat, Sukhdeva Muni says, "Oh King! Doubting does not become a true believer. The greatness of the great God is known to Thee. A cowherd, yet He is the mightiest of the mighty. Fed and fostered in the cradle of the world and addressed by Devaki as her child, *Atma*, yet He is unborn and self-existent. Amusing Himself among millions of *Gopis*, yet He is free from the slightest taint of a personal contact and aptly called the 'Lord' of

Yogeshwars (Experts in the science of Yoga). Such being the ways of Sri Krishna, there is hardly any room for doubt here. Even the immobile creation sings His praises and, through His love, the door of emancipation is opened wide on it."

To come to the point: Dressed in garments of variegated hues of their own choosing, the *bellis* of Braja⁸² come, no sooner they hear the flute. According to one text, their number is sixty crores and, according to another, three hundred crores. In fact the universe in one sweep is included within the orbit of His *Ras-Mandal*. Each one of them is daring enough to win the heart of Sri Krishna, yet the passionless Lord stands unmoved before them. Lest gushing sentiments of love, expressed at the start, should spoil the *Gopis* and they be puffed up with pride, the Lord, who knows the art of elocution to perfection,⁸³ had recourse, first, to mere words which, though chirpy, are only meant to test their love and have the indirect effect of touching their hearts to the quick and intensifying their attachment to Him. To use another metaphor: The Lord's speech is a sort of net, spread to catch the heart of the *Gopis*. The words He utters are full of allusion and imply more than what meets the ear. They have a double meaning, one ordinary and the other inferential,⁸⁴ one negative and the other positive.

Addressing the *Gopis* the Lord says, "Ye blessed

82 ब्रज सुन्दरी

83 वक्तान के मुकुट मणि

84 उपेक्षा व्यंजक न्यंजक

ones! Ye are welcome. What hospitality⁸⁵ might I offer ye all? In coming here ye have done me an honour and made me share your good fortune. Ye are the counterparts⁸⁶ of *Lakshmi* and, being endowed with the same estimable qualities as are undoubtedly hers, ye deserve to be near me. Great is your charm and your praises are sung in the world. Ye are extremely fortunate. In the world he is deemed lucky who owns wealth, jewels, rich costumes, fine houses, elephants and horses, feeds himself on sumptuous victuals, but remember, he is not to my liking. I like him who quits everything for My sake and takes refuge in Me. Persons there may be of ill-omen and hopeless, whose entrance into a village forebodes death and desolation. But ye are the recipients of My love and blessed harbingers of peace and prosperity, since your arrival here has wrought a marvellous change in this place and has turned it from a lonely, cheerless plain into a lovely pleasure-ground, full of so many jubilant trees that I see before Me. If ye are worn out and fatigued, verily, shampooing, fanning and other means can be employed to give ye rest. (These words are no doubt comforting and are a sort of flattering unction to the soul. Acids serve as antidotes to intoxicants. Lest so many good things, said of the *Gopis*, might turn their heads, the Lord now reverses the topic and speaks in another strain). But tell me, first, is it good for ye to have come here to these woods? No, surely it does not spell good. Is there anything here to draw your

affection? "I don't think there is any. If ye say that your longings and desires have something for their object that concerns Me, then I should know what that object is. I don't know what attachment ye bear to me and what I am capable of doing for ye."

The *Gopis* say, "Lord! By protecting Braja, You have saved us from time to time from terrible calamities that had overtaken us. Now that we have come to You, how is it, O Best-Beloved, You have become, so indifferent?"

"But is not Braja safe?" the Lord questions. "Has any calamity again befallen it? Is there any danger again from *Dawanal* (the all consuming forest-fire)? Has an enemy overtaken Braja? Is that wiseacre, Indra,* doing mischief again, on which account ye have all taken to flight and now want my protection? If there is any danger ahead just tell me that I might also escort thither my 'aged parents' (even they who look upon the Lord as their *Atma* to be fondled and caressed)."

The *Gopis* are simply dumb-founded to hear all this twaddle.

The Lord continues: "From your silence I conclude that Braja is safe, otherwise only womenfolk would not have repaired hither."

* Intelligence, if divorced from, that is, if not subordinated to God, is sure to work mischief. Brain, the top-most portion of the body is named 'Indra' for the purposes of 'Leela'; soul free from all impurities being called 'Braja', *Dawanal* of course is the fire that occasionally consumes our soul (हृदय पुण्य) when divorced from the Lord.

The fair visitors⁸⁷ have now the heart to say, "Dear,⁸⁸ it is for Thee alone that we have come here!"

"Yes, but what for? I don't know the object of your visit. Pray, tell me yourselves."

This question from the Supreme Lord damps the ardour of the *Gopis*. They begin to soliloquize thus— See the fun of it: alas! He has made us bid good-bye to our household duties,⁸⁹ our womanly patience and modesty. This Shri Krishna has drawn us all hither after sounding His flute, and now that we have come He asks, 'What for have ye come?' The infatuating effect of His flute has been too much for us and just like an intoxicated person we have managed to reach here, tumbling and toddling on our way, and good gracious, now He asks, 'Why have ye come?' The *Gopis* naively exchange glances among themselves just to know what they should say in reply. Some fair maidens look upward, some downward and some fix their gaze on flowers growing nearby.

Upon this the Lord says. "Ah. I see. Ye have come here simply to gather night-flowers for your *pūja*. It is not desirable to pluck flowers (with thorns lurking in them) at night. Although it is moonlit, yet it is dismal and dreary. Among the roots, leaves and branches of these creepers⁹⁰ and shrubs, little serpents and scorpions have made their home, and these from their hidden places sometimes sting unobserved. (Allusion here is to stinging impluses and temptations that overtake us in the midst of

beautiful surroundings). It is not, therefore, the time and place for plucking flowers of your choice. It is night-time, when ladies of good family ought not to venture out of their homes. Moreover, the place is infested with dreadful serpents, scorpions, lions, tigers, bears and other beasts of prey, who howl about at night in search of their prey. (What depravity is not committed under the shadow of darkness). It behoves ye, therefore, to retrace your steps homeward and not to loiter here a moment longer. If ye say that ye are wearied and want to rest here a while before returning, even then I won't advise ye to stop here. For, it is always against social etiquette and decorum for ladies to stay near a stranger. If ye were of an advanced age, (no longer subject to temptations), then it would have been a different matter. But ye are young and pretty. I know that ye are extremely pious⁹¹ and I am Krishna Brahmachari, bound by sacred vows to lead a life, undefiled by least impurity. That being so, possibly no harm can result from our staying near each other, yet we need not tempt our mind or trust it a bit too much. Ye can ask why I am here alone in this forest, where so many dangers abound. Poor and deserted as I am, I can afford to ignore the dangers. But ye constitute in yourselves a prize of great value, and for ye the risk is much great. Therefore, it is that I am asking ye to return forthwith to your homes."

The maidens make no reply. Their gaze is still fixed

upward! The Lord now works upon the theme and again asks, forsooth, in plausible words, "O virtuous, undefiled maidens! What is there in the direction of the sky for ye to look at? Surely, it is not day-time. If ye are afraid of your husbands and sons, rest assured they won't follow you here, for it is night. It is, as they say, piping time of peace, the time for music and festivity, for fun and frolic. See how the shimmering moon is playing upon yonder sandy waste of the sacred life-giving Jamuna. In this Brindaban the various birds and beasts, the lion and the lamb happily move about, forgetting their mutual animosities. The peacock, the cuckoo, and the *chatak* (rain-bird), who delight in singing their sweet notes, have made Brindaban their home. See, how inviting this forest-scene is! Ah! perhaps ye have come to feed your eyes on this glorious aspect of beautiful Brindaban. It is a vast garden in itself. Without a gardener to tell the secrets of gardening, one can't appreciate the inner beauty of a garden. I am the Gardener of sacred Brindaban. So let me take ye round the garden. Ah! how beautiful it is! Compared to the peace and tranquility of this place, one's home looks bereft of peace, cheerless. Ah! Flowers, how pretty do they appear! The moon is shedding her genial rays. The breeze, soft, sweet, pleasant and fragrant, is playing upon the scene. See, here is a bed of saffron. Here is one of roses. Here is another of jasmine. Varieties of *flowers grow here

* There are no English or Latin equivalents that would adequately convey the inner meaning of the original Sanskrit names of these flowers and plants. (the veritable 'growths' of the soul.)

and, remember, each variety is flourishing in a garden by itself. These gardens look like a veritable paradise, opened on the otherwise barren, dreary earth. Here are roses, tuberoses, marigolds, champakas, jasmynes, etcetra, flowers of different shades and hues, shedding their exquisite perfume. Many are the pretty little lakes of limpid water in which the water-lilies⁹² (*Menazanthus Indica*), are luxuriantly growing, whose intoxicating fragrance invites the bumble-bee to revel in their midst. On the edges of these lakes are to be found the celestial coral,⁹³ the swallow wort,⁹⁴ the palmyra,⁹⁵ the Kadam,⁹⁶ the date-palm and the cocoanut-palm and other trees that give shelter to numerous birds of fair plumage, the peacock, the cuckoo and the *chatak*, with whose sweet notes the whole wood resounds. See how the rays of the moon have richly enlivened the whole forest-scene! As a big chandelier constitutes the glory of a palace, even so this moon is a sort of chandelier, shedding its lustre over this palace-like Brindaban, nestling under the canopy of Heaven, (even so is a pure heart enlivened by God's own beauty and lustre)."

After showing them all over the place when nearing the bank of the Jamuna, the Lord says, "Blessed is this sanctified land of Brindaban, which is watered by the sacred Jamuna. Ah! look at these waves surging on the surface of the water. Are they so many hands of the flowing stream, beckoning ye to linger here? And these wind-tossed leaves clustering round the trees! Are they dancing for joy to welcome

you? Ah! no, ye ought not to linger here. That is not the way of chaste women, chaste aspirants for light, more light! Better return to your homes and serve your husbands faithfully as virtuous women, devoted to their husbands, do. Bellowing calves and weeping children at home might be ruining your absence. Ye have seen blessed Brindaban and should now go back and milk your cows and feed your children." The *Gopi*-sculs remind the Lord of their vows to wed Him and of the *Chirharan* Day when the Lord, in response to their humble prayers, promised His sweet fellowship to them.

But the Lord still nods His head and says, 'I know that ye are enamoured of Me, for I am the Omniscient Lord, and in Me the affections of the whole of the universe are centred. It is no wonder, then, that ye, the select among humankind, who constitute the glory of my creation — ye, who are the wisest of the wise and the beau-ideals of true love,'⁹⁷ — it is no wonder that ye should love me with all your heart. But, I want to know first, what has abruptly led ye to forsake your husbands. Attachment to one's husband is the first and foremost duty, devolving on a married woman—so runs the sacred text—and in deserting him great opprobrium is heaped on her head in this world and when she leaves this for the next, the door of Heaven is barred against her. Not only the husband, who should be served with a heart free from guile, but the husband's relations, too,

his parents, brothers and sisters are to be equally served by her. Such is the sacred injunction. If one's husband is quarrelsome, luckless, enfeebled by age, indolent, indigent or sickly, a virtuous wife on no account deserts him, even in the case of his apostasy or defilement by sin⁹⁸, though avoiding a personal contact she continues to serve him. So why court ignominy by associating with persons whose blandishments should always be shunned?

If ye say that according to Garaga Muni's message (yea, the voice of conscience) ye look upon Me as Narayana and prefer a life of devoted service to Me, then, believe Me, closer association with Me or My nearness does not generate in a person that feeling of love and devotion, as is produced by hearing and assimilating my word (an account of My doings), by contemplating on Me and by always singing My Name.⁹⁹ Therefore, I advise ye to go back to your homes."

On hearing these words of Govind — by no means comforting — the *Gopi*-souls are sorely disappointed. "For the Lord's sake we have quitted our homes, our husbands, our children and our parents and defied all canons of *Dharma*¹⁰⁰, womanly patience and modesty, but now the Lord means to turn us adrift. Alas! we are ruined." Such thoughts begin to surge in their breasts. The non-fulfilment of the object, with which they had left their homes, seriously sets them a-thinking. They sob and sigh. The rosy

98 कदाचित् अपने पति कूं कोउ पातक लग गयी होय

99 निरंतर कीर्तन 100 लोकाचार

hue of their lips and cheeks fades to pale ashes. Half-conscious and half-mad, their whole frame becomes benumbed as it were and their face is covered with perspiration. To all appearance they look scorched, just as a water-lily does when tossed about by a pitiless hot wind that blows during Indian summer. A sense of heaviness preys on their drooping hearts and they lower their heads. Why do they lower their heads? It is because they imagined themselves to be handsome and worthy of their beloved Lord's love, but now that they meet with a cold reception from Him, they hang down their heads in shame. Is it due to mere bashfulness or a womanly sense of modesty that they let their heads drop? Or is it on account of a gnawing anxiety that preys on their hearts in, first, quitting their homes and now finding themselves in the lurch? Who can vividly picture the diverse thoughts surging in the hearts of the *Gopis*?

"We heard the flute and imagined that our Beloved is calling us. We are now disillusioned. Ah! how foolish we have been. How shall we now face our comrades and what shall we say to them? We have come uninvited and deserve this treatment. We were under the impression that our Beloved will receive us with open arms, but how completely He has turned round, repudiating our love and devotion to Him. We fear He has a very poor opinion of us. Since we have fallen so low in His estimation, none in the heaven above or on the earth below can now give us shelter! O, where to hide our face from

this veritable fire of fiery words that are escaping from the Lord's lips, and that He willy-nilly is flaunting against us! Through the merry notes of His charming flute the Lord summoned us to share the joys of His sweet fellowship, but our appearance on the scene has made Him sad and He seems to have changed His mind. Cursed be this face of ours that is the cause of our Beloved's sadness! It is hardly worthy of being shown to One, Whom we love so intensely. But then our sad looks are likely to make Him all the more sad. Let us, therefore, drop down our heads. Ah! Is it not that His penetrating affectionate looks enslave our heart and soul? Let us, therefore, altogether avoid Him in the face. Cursed be the charms of soul — forsooth, a devotee — failing to evoke a response in the heart of the Lord. But it may be that the Lord's heart is of stone and does not easily melt. No, it can not be. The Lord, Sri-Krishna is perfect, possessed of all the virtues,¹ bound to be merciful,² the beau ideal of lovers, All-knowing and All-seeing. If we fare ill at His hands it is all due to our ill-luck and this forehead of ours, that contains the record of all evil happenings, deserves to be dashed to the ground. It may be that we have unintentionally done some wrong and have thereby incurred His displeasure. So let us ask His forgiveness by lowering our heads and touching His feet. This head of ours is heavily bent under the load of anxieties. Yet the Dispenser³ of our fortune

is perhaps bent upon heaping misfortune on us. O, let Him do His worst. "O Best Beloved ! Thou hast said enough If there are any more shafts left in Thy arrow-sack, do Thou discharge them at us. See our head is lowered before Thee. But why use arrows and why inflict on us this slow torture ? Why not knock off our heads with one stroke of a dagger ? O Thou, the shaper⁴ of our frail physical frame, could'st not Thou have so moulded our face as to be worthy of being shown to our Beloved Lord ?" Women and yet they be so slighted ! Ah ! it is a sight for the angels to weep ! But is the Idol of our hearts not an Arch-stealer ?⁵ Look at His stealthy ways ! To employ an agent — aye, the flute — to steal the jewel of our hearts and then to pose as a great sage and proffer the gratuitous advice to the robbed, 'Go away ! Go away !' Counsel of perfection, indeed, and from a sage ! Why did He rescue us from Indra's rage by lifting the Govardhan⁶ ? Was it for killing us by inches with His own hands ? Let us now assume the role of genteel, self-respecting women.

"Cow signifies both love and purity combined. A heart which is albeit conducive to the growth of Love and Purity is given a 'lift' by the Lord even at the expense of a man's intellect इन्द्री. In a wider sense he supports the little world within and wider world without us, which constitute a vast pasture-land for His 'kine'. It is one of His least achievement for effecting which He has only to lift aloft the tip of His little finger and no more. God helps those who help themselves; so others too must raise their sticks to support the Goverdhan.

4 विघाता 5 देवतान की स्त्री (देवांगना) 6 चोर चक्रवर्ती

When He recants His words, we shall lift our heads, otherwise not, Ah! Who will vouch now for our *bona-fides* and tell our Best Beloved that our love for Him is surely genuine and not that of a mere flirt girl? See, He is not a bit ashamed of being so remorseless in His conduct towards us womenfolk. Since He has bidden us to go back, we must somehow escape the ordeal of exchanging final glances with Him. Let him now smile to Himself, lest His full-blown lotus-like face might close its petals on seeing this lunar orb of our face. How cold, how indifferent He is! Since the time of our mutual attachment we have never picked a hole in His coat. Why is He then finding fault with us? Should not freedom from fault-finding be reciprocal? If we have really offended Him, surely this earth, on which we *Gopis* are standing, will swallow us up. For, has it not been said of the earth that it can bear all burdens but not that of a sinner against the Lord? Yet the blessed feet of the Lord are the sole concern of selfless⁷ devotees. Even if He be indifferent, let us concentrate our attention on His feet, separation from which we can hardly bear. Ah! Let us prostrate ourselves before Him. He may yet be inclined to have compassion on us, if, instead of one, millions of *Gopis*, all together, reverently bow down before Him. What else remains for us to do? Let us in the solitude of our hearts contemplate on Him — ah, seek Him. For, has it not been well said, "As ye think, so ye shall be?"⁸

Even if we meet our end with our thoughts centred in Him; we shall find final beatitude through absorption in Him. (This 'absorption,' the all-engrossing occupation of the mind, bears a different interpretation here from the one generally given to it by Vedantists.) The blessed thing that we incessantly think of till the end, — ah, the more so in the parting moments of our life — to that, it is said, we surely attain when we depart hence. Let us employ ourselves in the searching of our hearts. For, it is possible that there are defects in us that our Beloved does not like in us at all and which we must eradicate before we can please Him. Oh, our heart is failing us. Has it, perchance, bird-like taken flight at the sight of the fire, inadvertantly emitted by the fiery, hot words escaping from our Beloved's lips?"⁹ Have we undergone a metamorphosis? We are at any rate not what we were before. Of what use are we now to Him or even to ourselves? Let us put an end to our life by drowning ourselves in a well or in the Jamuna. Oh, will not this spectacle be too much for Him? Will He look on it unmoved? But we can blame no one but ourselves. It is we who have made Him compassionless. Maybe our reddish lips have emitted something to poison His mind against us. Or, it may be, that in His blissful state His mind has been quite upset and His speech is no longer in His control. "O fidgety heart! See how thy Best Beloved repudiates thee. If there is the

least feeling of love in thee, now is the time for thee to break in twain!" Yes, He can give us the slip and kick us out of sight, but let Him not call Himself clever on that account; try as He may, He cannot push Himself out of our hearts. For lo, its gates are heavily barred against Him!

"O beware! Put Thy cleverness aside and let us now lovingly embrace Thee in our hearts. If Thou wilt still renounce us, this earth shall witness now and here a huge hectacomb of our bodies and this episode will bring Thee a bad name. The event will be recorded in scriptures, which will be recited among huge congregations, and people will exclaim in terror, 'The Lord did this,' 'The Lord did that.' Who will call Thee good after that?"

Unable to bear the painful thought of the Lord's separation, the hearts of the *Gopis* were stirred to their inmost depths. A fire, so to say, the result of a passionate attachment to the Lord—was ignited therein and their hearts became like a boiling kettle, boiling over with passionate tears, that, unnoticed, escaped through the eyes, flowing down the cheeks on the breast. The black paste of the eyes, washed by the tears, marked the bosom with a black line, just as a sawyer does for sawing planks. (Here love is the sawyer, the Lord's separation is the saw and the aching heart of the *Gopis*, is to say, the planks about to be sawn by the sawyer.) The *Gopis*, pointing to their heart, say "See, O heart, what a cruel fate awaits thee." The fire within has to be quenched. How can it possibly be

done unless the eyes come to the aid of the heart? Lo! the blue waters of the Jamuna—even the Jamuna* of God's Love—rush on to stop the blazing fire ‡ There are millions and millions of *Gopis* and possibly the flood of their tears would assume huge proportions so as to engulf the whole of Braja—aye, the whole of the universe—but for their *prah-agn*¹⁰, (let us call it the divine spark within) itself helping to arrest it. For the tears, that trickled down in due course, were dried up by this immortal fire and

“With angels shared, by God given,

To lift from earth our low desire”

The carping critic can, perhaps, question, “Why did not the *Gopi* leave the place when they were told to go? The fact is that the *Gopis* are like the legendary bird, *Chatrik*, (*Conculus melano leucus*). The *Chatrik* is not satisfied with ordinary rain water. He longs for the *Suanti*¹¹ drop. Other liquids for him are like poison. Similarly, the sole concern of the *Gopis* is the Lord. All their desires,¹² their homes, their domestic ties, even public opinion¹³ and family¹⁴—honour they have sacrificed for Sri Krishna's sake. He is their Beloved. They would never part with the Lord. Notwithstanding His harsh treatment and harsh words, there they stand before Him with hearts throbbing, voices choked with something unspeakable and with tears, trickling down their cheeks. “He is ours—surely, dearest above all.

God's own near to ward off death.)

‡ Lit: यमुना The fiery ordeal of separation.

10 बिन्ह अग्नि 11 स्वाति 12 कामना 13 लोक त्याज 14 कुल ब्रह्मा

Where to go? It is better to die near Him." That is the thought uppermost in their mind.

The forlorn court death. The *Gopis* are under the impression that death is at hand to make short work of them. "But why should these tears of ours, even in the last hours, curtain-like obstruct our Beloved's vision beatific?" So they wipe off their tears as often as they come out. "Our fate is sealed. But never mind, let us have the satisfaction of having seen Him for once, before we commit our souls to Him." In their moody silence and the bitterness of their anguish, the painful thought breaks on them, "He is going to deprive us of our life for nothing said or done against Him." They pause and hesitatingly say, "Lord!¹⁵ We pray Thee not to utter such harsh¹⁶ words as 'go away'¹⁷ 'go away.'¹⁸ Such utterances ill-become Thee. Thy lips are so tender and we are afraid that anything harsh that Thy tongue uttereth may hurt Thy lips! Ah! we see. Thy otherwise bedecked person lacks one graceful ornament, to wit, the beautiful mirror-set¹⁹ thumb-ring. Here is then, one for Thee."

"What? Do ye take me for a woman?" So the Lord exclaims, "What shall I do with an *Arshi*?"

"But, then, art Thou really a *Purusha*?" The *Gopis* retort, "If Thou wert a *Purusha*,²⁰ Thou wouldst not treat us women in the way Thou hast done. With a mirror to reflect Thy face, Thou canst easily see that Thy harsh words, that cause us so much distraction, are not without their damaging effect on Thy

otherwise beautiful countenance. With a mirror to guide Thee Thou canst easily avoid speaking words, that ill-become these smooth and ruby-like lips of Thine. Sorely bitten as we have been by the piercing arrows, flung from Thy lips, we millions of *Gopis* shall quit our bodies and perish here, but we shall never follow Thy advice and return to Braja. We know for certain Thou wilt return to Braja and they will no doubt call Thee Women-queller and shun Thee. So to ward off these consequences why dost Thou not accept us in Thy sacred service? Renouncing all our worldly desires²¹ we have sought the shelter of Thy lotus feet. O Thou Invincible²² and inaccessible Lord! Pray, do not now abjure us."

With a view to testing if there is any grossness still left in the heart of the *Gopis*, the Good Lord queries, "Then, may I take it that ye hold me in the same position as ye do your husbands whom ye have forsaken"? The *Gopis* say, "Ah Lord! do not probe our heart too much. The clouds pour down refreshing showers and not poisonous liquids. We hold Thee in the same position as a *Chatrik* (*Cuculus mealon-leucus*) does the *Krishna Megha* (lit: Dark Cloud). Our relationship to Thee cannot be described in terms of an earthly or domestic phraseology. Thou art to us more than a loving friend²³ or a relation can be. Thou art our Lord, our God. In the person of *Krishna Megha* if Thou wilt rain poison instead of nectar, we shall swallow it and although it may be improper for us to

take this extreme step, yet we can hardly help it. Forsaking all our relations we have come to Thee. We shall die, if die we must, but *Chatrik*-like we shall repudiate the water of the ponds and lakes that may be near at hand. Never mind if it may mean to us the severance of our closest ties with the world around us. The cloud does not long for the *Chatrik*, the *Chatrik* longs for the cloud and the whole cloud.²⁴ Yet Thou art not like the inconstant and unconscious cloud. Intelligent, Immutable and All-pervading²⁵, Thou art the Inspirer²⁶ of human souls, the Adored²⁷ of all adorers! The Primeval Being, Narayana, never disavows His votaries, the seekers after salvation²⁸. Even so do Thou, O²⁹ Lord Supreme, discard us not and accept us, Thy devotees, in Thy service. All ordinances of *Dharma* emanate from Thee. For, Thou art the knower of *Dharma* and Thou hast said that the service of husband, children and relations is woman's foremost duty. We admit that, but it is not so much the religious precepts that we long to hear from Thy lips. It is one thing to preach *Dharma* and quite another thing to practise it. If Thou wert in our position and we were in Thine, then Thou would'st have been equally impatient of the very same treatment of Thee as we are at present experiencing at Thy hands. Our fundamental duty to serve our relations, we understand, but in serving Thee whole-heartedly we shall be best serving them, too. For, Thou art

24 सम्पूर्ण मेघ

25 विभो

26 विदग्ध

27 चूडामणि

28 मुमुक्षु

29 स्वतन्त्र

the inmost Self, the *Atman* of all creatures, their only friend and relative and dearest³⁰ to them above all. This 'muddy vesture of decay', a mere bundle of flesh and bones, is not to be loved for its own sake. We all love our relations for Thy sake, for the sake of the *Atman*. Yet, again, those who are not of Thee and with Thee, with them we have no concern. Thou art our own inmost Self, ever dear³¹ to us. The wise, who think so, love Thee with all the devotion of their heart. Moreover, what real comfort³² can we expect of our worldly-minded relatives? They are so troublesome. It is difficult to please one and all of them. But Lord *Parmeshwar* be kind³³ to us and O Lotus-eyed! do not destroy the hope that we have so long nourished in our breasts and for the fulfilment of which we look to Thee. Why lay an axe at the root of a tree Thou hast Thyself planted?"

"So urge us no more to return to our homes. Our legs and our hands, that busied themselves in homework, now refuse to obey us. They play truant at the very mention of our hearth and home. Our heart, that used to guide our legs and hands, is no longer in its place. It has, in fact, been stolen by Thee. So how can we return to our homes and what shall we do there? For us to recede now even a single step from Thy lotus feet, is impossible. For, the wish that precedes the act is lacking. O Krishna! Do thou quench the unquenchable fire that is steadfastly blazing in us. Without Thee the water of Thy Jamuna

even can't help us here. Only the life-giving nectar of Thy lips, yea, the nectar of Thy sweet inspiring word, has the power to control it, Ah see! How it has been set ablaze by Thy smiling looks³⁴ and Thy sweet, heart-ravishing flute! O pour forth the nectar to mitigate the flames within, that are consuming us. If Thou won't do it, the two cross-fires—our passionate-longings³⁵—pitted against Thy refusal³⁶ will light a large conflagration, a sort of creamatorium to burn us and we shall, O Friend³⁷, achieve our object, aye, attain Thee through meditation or else haunt Thee even ghost-like ever after we are dead and gone!"

"O Best Beloved! Don't think for a moment that this fire of ours can be quenched by any one else but Thee. Ever since our heart's love has been stirred by a bare touch of Thy lotus feet—ah, the feet that are a source of infinite pleasure to *Kamala*, our mind is continually absorbed in Thee and we can't think of any one else, much less stand near Him. For whose favouring glance* even the gods long and labour for, that Lakshmi, although high-placed and seated in Thy heart, cherishes a desire along with her rival *Tulasi* to secure the nectareous essence of Thy lotus-feet—even the essence that is so dear to, and sought after by, Thy devotees. We, too, O Lord, have sought the protection of Thy lotus-feet and Lakshmi-like crave its nectar. It will only redound

34 चितवन 35 प्रेम अग्नि 36 बिरह अग्नि 37 सखे

*That attitude of mind, in which the devotee's sole aim (लक्ष्य) is to be always near God, is represented as the fairest of the fair and named Lakshmi.

to Thy glory, if a corner of Thy heart is reserved for us all, in the same way as it is reserved for Lakshmi. O Thou, the only solace of the sorrow-stricken! Our hopes, cut off from the world, are centred in Thee and we see no haven of rest anywhere but in devotional attachment to Thee. O, permit us to be near Thee and grant us, *O Purusha-Bhushan* (for Thou art superior to all human beings), the proud privilege of being Thy blessed maid-servants."

"But your home," the Lord says, "is to you a principality and you proudly reign therein as its sovereign *Rani*. How is it that abandoning that privileged position, you want to be my maid-servant?"

"Beloved Lord! The full-blown lotus of Thy face—the fairest flower before which soft, silken primroses fade—has captivated the heart of one and all of us. Thy winsome looks, Thy soft smiles and Thy charming glances are such as none can resist and the moment a bird-soul is drawn near Thee, it is caught in their net. Above all, Thy all-powerful limbs, that remove all fear and apprehension from the hearts of those that seek their protection; Thy all-loving heart, the favourite seat of Lakshmi; and Thy personality, so delightful and so pleasing—all these are factors that have made us all a bond-slave of Thee. Beloved Krishna! It is neither Lakshmi nor Thy devotees alone, who are so enamoured of Thee. Among the womenfolk* of the three worlds we find none, who, on hearing nectarious

*Remember the Purusha is one, the whole of His creation (जगत्) being the fair fraternity (स्त्रीमय).

songs of Thy flute, or on being gifted with Thy vision *par excellence*, does not lose her patience and passionately love Thee. What to speak of the womenfolk? Even the birds, the beasts, the kine, the deer (*mrigas*) and the trees are all delighted to hear³⁸ the music of Thy flute and respond to Thy beautiful glances. As the *Adi Purusha*—the Primeval Being *Narayana*—in His own heavenly sphere, the *Swarga*, looks after the well-being of the heavenly creation, i. e. the immortal beings, similarly, O Thou, the Aegis of *Brajabasis*! Thou hast manifested Thyself in this *Brajamanee* (to wit, the world) surely with the object of affording relief and consolation to those who may be afflicted in mind and body. If Thou consciously or unconsciously becomes the cause of the death of so many millions of *Gopis*, O just think of the sore affliction Thou wilt thereby cause to their survivors. The sum-total of the world's misery will be thereby increased, and the very object of Thy manifestation defeated. Hence, O Thou, the Friend of the poor and the distressed, just let these soft, lovely hands of Thine—hands that have imparted their softness to the water—lily—O, just let them graciously touch our hearts, whereby all our inward pain will cease as if by magic, and peace will surely reign, where now passions hold sway!”

Thereupon a *Gopi* exclaims, ‘What? Sisters! Do ye ask our Beloved to touch our stern, stony hearts with His hands? Would not a mere touch hurt His hands?’”

38 रोम खड़े हो जाते हैं

And all, all exclaim, "Yes, we see" (addressing the Lord, they say) "Lord! Do Thou instead place Thy hands on our forehead. The fire within will cease to trouble us the moment we receive a touch of Thy hands."

Moved by the piteous bemoanings, prayers and appeals of the *Gopis*, the merciful Sri Krishna, the Lord of *Yogeshwars*, to wit the masters of Yoga, aye the the Lord, who dwelling in the inmost recesses of the human heart, makes thereof a wedding-bed to sport with the human soul,⁴¹ laughs and speaks thus:

"Fair ones! Ye now see how it makes one uneasy when love is crossed. When I was after thee thou were indifferent to Me. Now a little indifference on My part has made thee so solicitous. A prize loses its value when lightly won. The mental agony that ye have undergone to win Me over, will stiffen your souls and increase your reverence for Me. Lo! I am now at your service to lift the extreme heaviness of your heart, so rich in devotional feeling and fervour. Since ye have won me over ye might do with me as ye like, I would fain make ye all the precious pearls of my necklace to adorn my breast. I thirst as much for the pure nectar of your love as ye thirst for Mine. My fondness for ye, remember, is not a whit less than yours. Ye dwell in my heart and I dwell in yours. Come, let us strive for the perfection of this communion."

Thus the Lord smiling and chatting, in communion sweet, begins to divert⁴² the hearts of the *Gopies*⁴². The rosy laughter and smiling glances of their Beloved

Sri Krishna were, mirrored in the *Gopis'* own countenances that looked all aglow. Among so many *Gopis* the Lord Sri Krishna, whose⁴³ generous impulses and⁴⁴ exuberent smiles indicate the immensity of His heart and the lustre of whose teeth defies that of white *Kund*,⁴⁵ looked beautiful and resplendent like the veriest Moon among the starry host of Heaven. The Lord's⁴⁶ *Vaijayantimala*, the garland of victory composed of sapphires⁴⁷, pearls⁴⁸, rubies⁴⁹, topaz⁵⁰ and diamonds⁵¹ marks Him out as the observed of all observers among admiring devotees. He moves about among multitudes of cheerful *Gopi souls* whose number is legion,⁵² (*lit*: countless) uttering His merry notes, listening in turn to their songs and lending His charm to the whole forest scene. The poets and the mystic enthusiasts in expatiating on this theme speak of the celestial pair (Sri Krishna and Sri Radha) as standing in the centre, treading a measure and the *Gopis* round them in a circled orb, singing hallelujahs! The sketch is by no means over-stretched if one is to take into account a devotees' aspirations and his spiritual experiences. I would let a songster speak in his own vein".

43; उजारा जिनकी चश्मा 44 उदार हंसनि 45; कुन्द; 46; बैजन्ती माला; 47 नीलम; 48 मोती; 49 माणिक; 50 पुखराज 51 हीरा; 52 असंख्य;

पद

*सरद चन्द सुखकन्द नन्द मुकन्द बन बैन बजी ।

आतुर गई नई ब्रज बनिता छई बिपन सब साज सजी ।

बिमल बिलास रास मण्डल, मानो अस पास घन घटा छजी ।

तान तरंग मृदंग चङ्ग धनि साज संग सुर बाज मजी ।

कुम कुम छन नन मयूर गती छुमु छुमु छन नन नन उपजी ।

कह बलदेव पृथिवि धिधि किंठ नकट तरकट तरकट नतजी ।

Baldev the songster speaks "The autumn full moon Krishna Chandra, when played on His flute on the night of *Sarad Purnima*, bewitched all the *Gopikas* of *Brij Mandal* who ran in ecstasy towards the gorgeously decorated Brindaban. The whole atmosphere of the *Ras Mandal* was full of celestial joy and merriment, as if covered with crowds of thick monsoon clouds spread out dancing in the sky. The whole *Ras Mandal* was electrified by the presence of Sri Krishna Chandra and *Gopikas*. The celestial peacock dance and the musical notes were a marvel."

At that time to mark the auspicious hour of *Ras* the full moon regent, bathed the soft sandy bed of the Jamuna—pressed down as it is first by the overflowing stream so as to let the particles of sand settle down and not fly about to the detriment of the participants in the Festival. The Luminary's genial rays have imparted their own freshness and lustre to the sand. To adorn the scene the lunar orb has unlocked the white lotus.⁵³ Its delightful sweet fragrance is pervading the whole atmosphere. Soft, cool breeze, laden with sweet odours, is blowing all the while. The cool, translucent waves of the Jamuna are washing the shore affording delight to one and all. The whole scene is, highly fascinating. The only thing wanting to "renew the life of joy in our happiest hours" is the nectar-*rean* juice, — the juice of Love ethereal — even the juice that our best beloved God alone can lend. Ah, for the exquisite bliss it affords to the human soul to sport with one's beloved Lord amidst such hallowed

surroundings! The Omnipresent lends a 'draught of cool - refreshment' and the soul is inebriated. That is what happens in the case of the *Gopis*. The whole place is filled with the Lord's holy presence. A mere touch of The Divine Hand, a loving embrace, a soft smile, a sweet glance and lo! the soul is transported. The flame, tended by the Lord flares up a hundred-fold.

[A thousand hearts beat happily ; and when, music arose with its voluptuous swell. Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again. But a soul has to be on its guard lest this soul inebriation results in a swollen head. Favoured by the Lord the *Gopi soul* imagines that in beauty,⁵⁴ appearance,⁵⁵ virtue,⁵⁶ and good fortune⁵⁷ there is none in the world that can beat her and that her Lord is now under her thumb.] "Jony I am tired, I want to be fanned. See my *sari* has gone off. My foot ornament has come out. I cannot keep pace with Thee. I want this thing, I want that. In this way love's exactions become manifold and when satisfied in full, a sense of egotism grows - a noxious weed that by-and-by retards the growth of godliness in the soul. This egotism has to be purged out by a process of compunction. No shock is greater for an aspiring soul, that has basked in the sunshine of The Divine than a sense of estrangement from the Lord brought about by its own bumptious ways. Idle conceit and supercilious frame of mind can hardly thrive in a soil, watered by contrition and suffering for our Beloved, for whose reunion-aye-embrace, a soul

considers no sacrifice too great and no affliction too severe. People in adversity make common cause. A soul bereft of the Great Lord, the crown and comfort of his life, feels himself practically stranded. He is hardly in a mood to assume an over-weening attitude towards others, much less towards his compeers.

Taking the situation at a glance, the Lord withdraws Himself from the blessed communion, leaving *Gopi-souls* in the lurch. And why does the Lord withdraw Himself? The devotees would answer in their own way. The Tempter is like unto a crocodile, found lurking in the ocean of love. The Lord dives down to whack and turn him out. The Lord does not actually withdraw Himself. In the sailing boat of Divine communion⁵⁸ the water of conceit⁵⁹ gets in to sink it. The Lord drains the water out to save the weak vessel from going to the bottom. To use another metaphor. The soul gets badly drunk with the wine⁶⁰ of conceit. The Lord serves the sour sense to prevent it from getting into the head and to keep his devotee sober. Self-conceit is a loathsome disease and alienation from the Lord⁶¹ is a bitter potion that would surely and effectively combat it. Another more appropriate and cogent explanation is that the Great Lord is like unto a dyer and the heart of the *Gopis* is like unto a clean sheet of cloth made over to the Dyer to give it a colouring. The Good Lord does it but to make the colour fast and - permanent and to prevent it from

58=सौभाग्य रूप मौका 59=मद कप जल 60=मदिरा

61=अन्त ध्यान कप क^२वी औशधी

fading. He uses a mordant which proves sure and effective or it may be that the Lord means to curb the pride of the Tempter and therefore repairs to His own castle. In any case, for the *Gopis* the Lord's retirement from the scene is like unto a torpedo shot by a submarine against their sailing vessel in the deep. With the eclipse of the full Moon, their own Krishna Chandra⁶² the World for them seems all enveloped in darkness. It seems as if their heart's saffron bed has all of a sudden been struck by lightning. The cup of sweet nectar just held to their lips slips fast from their hands and for a time in their profound disappointment 'words that weep and tears that speak' fail them.

CHAPTER II

THE QUEST

The *Gopis* smart under the stunning blow administered to them by their beloved. Their love for Him is undimmed. Not seeing their Beloved (Krishna Chandra) in their midst, the *Gopi souls* become extremely uneasy. A group of elephants **without** their lordly hero, the 'Gajraj' could not be more ill at ease than these fair maids of Braja without One, their Beau-Love, who has a great fascination for them. Their hearts ravished by the Lord's sweet demeanour, love, smiles, glances, jolly ways and inspiring talk takes delight in all that appertains to Him, barring everything else and so, kept in communion, their soul loses its identity in the Lord.

Love took up the harp of life, and smote
on all the chords with might ;
Smote the chords of self, that, trembling,
passed in music out of sight.

Losing their self consciousness in the Lord and totally absorbed in Him the *Gopi Souls* copy the Lord's ways and imagine themselves to be Shri Krishna. But the mind oscillates again, the thought of their Beloved Lord returns and maddened by His love they go about in His search from wood to wood, from thicket to thicket, loudly singing His praises all the while. About

Him, the Highest Being, their own beloved (Shri Krishna) who sky-like pervades all beings, in and out of them, the *Gopis* thus question the vegetable faunae, knowing that they have the vital spark, the breath of life working in them and that they are by their very nature benevolent: innured to heat, cold and rain they afford rest to the weary wayfarer, who takes shelter under their shade, feed him with their fruits, fan him with their leaves; it may be that they are the Spirit-incarnate of sages and seers born in this world for doing benevolent deeds. Even when struck by stones they yield in return nice fruits — a fact so inadequately expressed in the language of their foes, as the hand that striketh them.

The first trees the *Gopis* come across are rows of the peepal tree, the plaksh, (*Ficus infectoria*) and the Indian fig tree*. Addressing they say 'O Peepal! O Pluksh! O Banyan! Pray tell us if ye have anywhere seen our Beloved Shri Krishna locked surely in the interior of our self was the jewel of our heart. Using His own key of smiles and glances that would fit in the lock, Shri Krishna has through the agency of His amiable flute robbed us of our jewel. Do tell us please, if ye positively know His whereabouts.' After stopping a while and not receiving an answer the *Gopis* exclaim, 'Yes we know: Awkward people seldom volunteer any information. Ah! we have done nothing to merit this

2=शुद्धि, मुनि; 3 परोपकार; 4 पीपल 5 बट 6 प्लक्ष;

* Footnote:— These names imply a stage of ascertainment in which lower passions are absolutely under one's control.

attitude of sullen silence indicative of discourtesy on your part.' Among themselves they say, 'O it is useless to ask these trees. What if they are laden with little fruits when they know not what is benevolence,⁷ what is duty?⁸ They are mostly devoid of flowers. Their heart⁹ is not sound¹⁰. Upon this one of the *Gopis* whispers, 'Sisters! we have grouped these trees together and addressed them collectively. Therein lies our mistake. Methinks their stolid silence is to be attributed to their inward jealousy, rank, pride and haughtiness. Since our question is not addressed to a particular tree, they have refrained from replying; for if they do it collectively, all will share the credit for it. It seems that like most individuals they are particularly more or less very jealous of their credit. All, all want to cut a figure in the world. The glory of His name and fame none would share with others. So it would be better to address each tree individually.'

Thus decided, they address the *Peepal* first. Why *Peepal* first? For both by tradition and common consent, the *Peepal* belongs to the very front rank of trees, not unlike some people—call them Brahmins or Sadhus if you please—who claim the first rank among men and exact our homage, not so much on account of their caste, their birth or their personal attainments, as on account of one angelic virtue, singled out among many, compassion,¹¹ which they possess in a pre-eminent degree, compassion, which is the very essence, the soul of *Dharma*, which lifts a person far above the average run of mankind and marks him out

as a prince among men, whose heart bleeds for their sorrows, who never sees a wrong without redressing it, who joyfully accepts a cross, a crown of thorns and gives blessings in return.

“O *Peepal*”, the *Gopis* say, ‘Thou art blessed. Crossing thy pleasant shade has gone One, Who ever looms before our eyes as a Luminous Star, the Fairest of the Fair, who is the very Soul of Bliss, they call Him *Nand Nandan*, Who more engilds the night than all your fiery eyes of light; O *Peepal*! for pity’s sake tell us if thou hast seen Him going anywhere!’ The *Gopis* wait and wait. No reply is vouchsafed by the *Peepal*. Hush! The tree shakes its leaves through the action of the wind. ‘No, I have not seen. No I have not seen.’ That is what it means by shaking its head and shrugging its shoulders, the *Gopis* infer. – O let us proceed further.

They next come to *Pluksh* (*Ficus infectoria*) and address it thus. ‘Halo *Pluksh*!’ ‘One who possesses the beautiful gay eyes of a gazelle, whose head the the peacock’s feathers adorn, aye, our Guardian Angel has just gone this way. O tell us if thou hast seen Him.’

Onward the *Gopis* proceed and approaching a banyan tree observe among themselves, ‘Oh! Its head is raised aloft. Its topmost branches almost point Heavenward. Everything comes within its purview. It must have seen our beloved Lord. Let us as well ask it.’ Getting near they prefer their request in these words: ‘O hoary, ageworn banyan! The Charmer¹² of human

hearts clothed in garments of gold³ with bright alluring curls, expert in singing, after inviting us to *Bansi-But* has quietly slipped away from our midst. Be so good as to let us know if thou hast seen Him anywhere along the banks of the Jamuna.' Not receiving a reply, the *Gopis* remark 'O leave it alone. It won't tell us. Lofty heads have always thick skulls. Have not even camels got long necks? But who credits them with good brains?'

Proceeding further, the *Gopis* enter a beautiful¹¹ wood, all radiant and odorous with fine flowery trees. Ah! They exclaim, we can expect a better response from these hospitable trees that invite the bumble-bee¹² to feed on their flowers. They, so to say, keep an open house for all comers and will surely welcome us as their guests and give us the needful information. So getting close to them they say 'O *Kurvank**¹³, (*Piabansa*)¹⁴ *Barleria prionitis*. O, *Ashoka*¹⁵ (*Saraca Indica*), O *Naga-Kesara*.¹⁶ (*Masuaferrea*) O, *Champak*!¹⁷ One whose soft smiles conquer the pride of the proudest dowdies, who give themselves airs, forsooth the younger brother of Balbhādra, pray, have ye seen Him passing this way? O, Balarā thou art known all over the world for thy beneficence, oh do then, take the credit of guiding us on the right track' Not receiving a reply,

* *Kurvank* = Sin-destroyer. *Ashoka* = One who does not sin, knows not sorrow. Bereft of all anxieties. *Nagkeshar* = One whose head and heart are fully developed emitting fragrance all round. *Champak* = One who is not troubled by nasty passions.

13 पीतपट 14 पुष्पोका बन 15 मरुंद 16 कुरवंक 17 पियाबांसा
18 अशोक 19 नागकेसर 20 चंपक.

they observe, 'Ye! Thy very name is hard to pronounce. This harshness has, perhaps, permeated thy heart. Therefore, thou art so apathetic and indifferent. Turning to *Ashoka*, they say, 'O, *Ashoka*! Do thou help in delivering us of our sorrow²¹. Only tell us which way our beloved (Shri Krishna) has gone? How canst thou deny the information and say that thou hast not seen Him, when the broken leaves bearing evidently the impress of His fore fingers, indicate that, He has just been here. Our — heart's ease, that constituted all our riches has been snatched away by Him. Prithee! Put us right on His track and make us like thyself, *Ashoka* (bereft of sorrow).'

Finding *Ashoka* too unrelenting, they approach *Naga-Kesar* (*Mesua ferrea*) and say, 'O *Nag*! That *Mahabhog*²² blessed Shri Krishna must have been noticed by thee going this way. O, tell us that thou knoweth of His whereabouts! Its silence elicits from the *Gopis* the remark. 'O! It is a veritable *Nag* (Snake) full of venom. Its reticence is so irritating, but it is all due to its being venomous. It is not perhaps in its nature to be kind to others.' Approaching *Champak*, they propose to repeat their important question, but refrain from doing so, exclaiming "Lo! Its complexion has turned yellow on our arrival here. This indicates its jealousy and mistrust of us. That being so, we can't get any information out of it too. Ah! these dull²³, spiritless trees can hardly be expected to enter into our feelings and do us a good turn. Unfortunately for us, they belong to the heartless²⁴, male catagory.

One of our sex is more likely to know our feelings and to sympathise with us. Soft is the heart of the softer sex. Here is *Tulsi*! (*basil*) She belongs to our category. She can properly gauge the intensity of the pure flame, that burneth in a woman's breast. Oh, let us ask her.'

Approaching Basil (*Tulsi*)²⁵ they address her thus :
 "O well-meaning *Tulsi* ! Thou art wedded to the Lord's feet. Thy garland, round which the whole family of bumble-bees hum about and chant their delightful music, adorneth the neck of thy most beloved Shri Krishna. We beseech thee to tell us if He has gone this way. Oh ! hast thou seen Him going? Why not tell us, then? O *Tulsi* we are glad to see thee so joyous. We know thy brighter looks are due to thy Beloved's loving embrace, without which we are pining away. Ah ! The tightening grasp of His love is upon us. Who will pity us in our sad plight and reunite us with the merciful Lord, who is hiding Himself, eluding our grasp? O *Tulsi* ! we ask thee again and again. Won't thou even raise thy head to look at us? Art thou so proud? Has thy intimacy²⁶ with the Lord made thee so conceited? Drinking deep of His love, has thou become so indifferent to the cry of thy less fortunate sisters? Or does thou look down upon us as thy rivals?"

Not receiving a reply the *Gopis* naively say , "Oh ! She won't concede any information. She really considers us as her rivals. She would exclusively enjoy the Lord's love and communion and would not condescend

to make other longing souls as her co-sharers therein."

Proceeding further they noticed *Malati*²⁷ (*Hiptage Madablota*) and exclaim. "Here is *Malati* She too belongs to our sex. Ah! Her blooming face indicates that she has been blessed with a vision of our beloved Shri Krishna. Hence, it is that she is so gay and has put forth fine blossoms. She will surely give us a clue to our Lord. Let us sit beneath her blossoms in a prayerful mood and silently address her a prayer. 'O *Malati*! Our illustrious guide and most dearly loved friend and companion. Shri Krishna, has left us along in these lonely woods. Without Him we are wretched, writhing with agony. The night surely looks hideous without Him. Roving in the dust we are at our wit's end and know not what to do. His separation has driven us mad. Ah for the piping time of peace we fondly had with Him! Who will restore our Krishna - - our soul's delight—to us. We are after Him. Oh tell us if thou hast seen Him—our Krishna of blessed countenance, anywhere in the playgrounds of sacred Brindaban.'

Closeby *Mulika*²⁸ (*Jasminum Sambac Vax*) and *Jahi*²⁹ *Joohi*³⁰ (*Jasminum auriculatum*) whom the *Gopis* greet thus. 'O *Mullika*! Thou art so elated, so exultant! O

* One who enjoys the company of the Lord (Mal-Vishnu).

** The names of these flowers betoken a corresponding state of human soul in which God's realisation is rendered more or less possible (1) Through self purification—(*Mulika*) which is of course reflected in one's thoughts, words and deeds and (2) Through self consecration (*Joohi*).

27 मालती. 28 मल्लिका 29 जाही 30 जुही.

Speak to us of the whereabouts of our beloved Shri Khrishna, a touch of whose blessed hands is evidently making thee rejoice so triumphantly and smell so sweet! O *Joohi* gratified with a touch of the Divine hand of *Madhava* thou art equally blessed. O do not withhold from us the information we seek.'

After a pause, the *Gopis* say: 'Oh they are the handmaids of *Tulsi*. They are afraid of their Danny,³¹ Julging Lord and won't disclose any information about Him. Being not themselves independent,³² they can't-betray their Master's confidence in them. So we need not bother them and compel them to divulge a secret they are not at liberty to disclose.'

Further up the *Gopis-souls*, seekers after the Lord, come across rows of trees growing along the banks of the Jamuna, standing unmoved, as if controlling their outward sensations and inwardly remembering the Lord (Vishnu). The semblable coherence of these trees and of the spirits of some people, devoted to God and absorbed in His contemplation, is truly wonderful. The *Gopis* have high hopes of their veracity and believe that whatever they say will not be undiscernable and undignified twaddle or mince-meat, but open-hearted and unmistakeable truth.

They approach the trees one by one addressing them thus. "O doot!*"³³ Surely, thou must be knowing *Nandpoot* (lit: Offspring of bliss) who keeps in His employ a naughty messenger, a flute³⁴ to boot. After

* One absorbed in adoration.

31 सपत्नी तुलसी के भय से 32 स्वतंत्र. 33 दूत 34 बेणुदूत.

inviting us from our homes, He has been heartless enough to leave us in our present predicament. O *Priyal*³⁵! (*Bichanana Latifolia*). To be forsaken by one's love is a torture we can ill bear. Our beloved Gopal, Nandalal, in quietly leaving us has reduced us to these straits. O, help us in finding Him out! O Jack tree! (*Panasa*)³⁶ In Brindaban thou alone art mercifully disposed. We have implored all and sundry, but have found none in a mood to help us in tracing the oracle of our soul, whom we love and adore, the sweet strains of whose flute (Music Divine) are still ringing in our ears and constantly remind us of Him. O *Panas*! Do thou kindly help us in our dilemma. Creeping into our hearts by stealth, He has robbed us of our patience and is now hiding Himself. Laden with so many fruits, thy florid looks indicate that thou art privy to His secrets. Oh unbosom thyself to us and make no secret of His present whereabouts, we pray thee!

O *Asana*!³⁷ (*Bridelia retusa*) Do thou tell us of the lurking place of our *Nand-Nandan*, Who plays at hide and seek with our soul, aye whose smiles are so winsome, whose vision beatific is sure to dispel the gloom of our drooping heart. He Who 'In clear dream and solemn vision' tells His ardent devotees of things that no gross ear can hear.'

O *Kachnar*³⁸ (*Bauhinia Variegata*). It does not behove thee to seal thy lips and keep a secret from those

* One blessed with the beloved Lord's beatific vision
 ** Destroyer of devilish propensities. *** Comely and resplendent, shining with love divine. **** One highly gifted with the riches of love or learning. Gold -riches-
 कांचन, प्रेम धन, ज्ञान धन 35 प्रियाल 36 पनस 37 असन 38 कचनार.

who belong to thy sex. O, tell us if our Beloved, whose—glances dazzle and stupefy 'the vision feminine' is niding Himself somewhere in thy vicinity.

O *Jamuna*! (*Eudenia Jambolana*). In this wood we are looking for one, the idol of our heart, than whom there is none more adorable, say, where shall we find Him?

Oh^{*10} *Ak* (*Calotropis Giganteca*)! Without our beloved Lord, who is pleased with trifles and yet who is to us the most valuable asset of our life, Ah, without Him we are mere shadows of our former self, mere shells devoid of substance, even as an oyster is denuded of its pearl of great price."

"O *Basil*^{*11} tree (*Aeglo Marmellos*)! Thou art blessed since our Krishna has fondly touched thy heart's—fruit with His own hands."

"O calm and dignified *Bakul*^{*12} (*Mimusops Elengi*)! catching a glimpse of our Beloved¹² thou hast become so tranquil, so free from restlessness! Inwardly thou must be rejoicing, for, it seems our playful Krishna going this way has honoured thee by weaving a chaplet of thy flowers, so fascinating and so fragrant¹² to wear round His person. So we are sure thou can't be unaware of His mysterious movements. O sweet and savoury Mango,^{***13} the prince and parent of fruit-trees!

* Dispeller of all darkness, (अके)

** One with fond passionate attachment for the Lord. (बिल्व)

*** One with beautiful head. (मौलश्री)

**** One free from all impurities implying prominence.

39 आक 40 बेल 41 बकुल 42 प्राण प्यारा 43 सुपारी 44 आम.

After an unsuccessful search elsewhere we have come to thee. Don't be so uncommunicative and reserved. Reveal to us the hiding place of our beloved Lord, our Comforter, our *Ghanshyam**⁴⁵ who will lift for us this dark cloud of heavy painful trial, that has separated us from Him."

"O *Kadamb!**⁴⁶ Surely One, whom we love so dearly, going this way has refreshed and disported Himself beneath thy hallowed shade. Has He not? What a lovely sport it must have been with a ball of thy flowers? It must have afforded Him a fine pastime to lower thy branches, to swing backward and forward, to get on thy top and to move up and down? Do point out to us, O *Kadamb*, the path that will lead us to Him, who is the mainstay of our Brijā, the lode star of every eye."

"O, all ye graceful trees, gracing the banks of the Jamuna and sanctifying the hallowed ground of Brindaban, your existence on this sacred soil is surely meant for a noble purpose, even though it be of doing good to others! Do ye not consider us fit objects of your charity and your benevolence? If so, why do ye not respond to our repeated enquiries and help us in our quest? Shall we go away hence, heart-sick and disappointed with a void in our heart that can never be filled but by our beloved Lord, our own Krishna, who is eluding our search?"

To the utter bewilderment of the *Gopi Souls*, there

* Selfless implying self-restraint that resists and conquers all evils,

45 घनश्याम 46 कदंब,

is no response. Perhaps, the trees do not like to be disturbed in their *Samadhi* of Vishnu (the State of absorption in the Lord) when the strings of life seem to snap and the senses become quiescent, refusing to perform their proper functions. The good-natured questant-querists turn away from the stolid meditative brood with the thought that long residence in a sacred place of pilgrimage, perhaps, renders one callous and inhospitable. Fat and shining with a well-cared-for tough exterior, their interior, too, gets proportionately hardened.⁴⁷ They rest satisfied with mere superficialities and never get at the bottom of things. Being morbidly exact and punctilious in their religious observances, their rites and practices lose all meaning for them. 'Krishna', 'Krishna' they repeat often automatically, but what is the nature of the Deity and what does this August name signify they know not. They might have seen Krishna, yet they badly behave as one who has not seen Him. So, the questants say, let us avoid these hardened formalist and approach others who may have a more deep and abiding faith and who may be constantly in touch with the Lord.

The *Gopi Souls* now turn their attention to other trees. Addressing dear *Areca-palm* (*Areca Catechu*)⁴⁸ they say, "Has not our beloved Lord on His way wistfully looked on thee and thy singing, rustling, long leaves? O blossom, of *Kunda*⁴⁹ (*Jasminum Pubescens*) the purifier of earth, dost thou not hold in thy beautiful bud the secret of our Lord's movements? Oh *Plantago*!⁵⁰ Fructifying through the fruitful ways of the sun! Our wound, which is fresh,

47 मोटा सोटा 48 सुपारी 49 कुन्दक कनी 50 कदली, भानु फल.

can, perhaps, be healed by thee. O high-souled Date-palm!⁵¹ Thou hast the gift of long vision. Say where is He? We are weary, full of care. O *Neem*⁵² (Margo-sa tree), do thou infuse fresh strength in us and restore to us our beloved Philander. There is something in thy almost sable complexion. O *Palmyra* (*Borissus Flabellifar*)⁵³ that endears thee to us, do thou show us the way out of our difficulty. Do thou, O *Amra*⁵⁴ (the *Hag plum*)* help us kindly in our sore misfortune. O ye grapes! Who else but our Lord could have filled your sacs with a sweet nectar, even the nectar of His own lips? Oh, do not retain the secret that ye should fain proclaim to the world and guide it on its right course. O, *Karil*⁵⁵ (wild creeper),** since the Lord is so fond of thy flower-bud, do thou communicate to Him the intense anguish and pain that He has caused us by His separation."

The trees, fruits and flowers fail to respond to the deep fetched groans of the questants. In their profound agony they turn their attention to the beasts of the earth and the fowls of the air.

Strutting about here and there on the heath and in the forest retreats, so jubilant over thy chase after malicious reptiles, whom thou wouldst fain entirely exterminate from this earth, "Hast thou not, O peacock, come across our lovely Krishna. Who frequently honours thee by using thy feathers to adorn His Head? Thou art, O parrot, so fond of fretfully repeating the name of our Lord. Canst thou be our guide in our

* Shrubby myribilam. ** Capparis aphylla.

51 खजूर 52 नीम (सर्वताम्र) 53 ताल तमाल 54 पामर 55 करील.

quest after Him? Thine eyes, O *Khanjan*⁵⁶ (the common wagtail) have something beautifully in common with our Krishna, Who looms so largely in our thoughts, dreams, sighs, wishes and tears, all poor fancy's followers. Oh, just direct thy penetrating eyes to indicate His whereabouts to our eager expectant eyes. (*Chakora*⁵⁷ (*Bartavelle*), who anxiously look forward to the appearance of the mighty orb, the divine face of our Krishna, that outshines the sun and the moon, even as thine eyes wistfully behold the moon as it graceth the sky! O, when shall He condescend even *Chakor*-like, to look at us, full in the face, and thereby dispel the tertian fever of His separation that has seized us? O cuckoo⁵⁸ (*Coculas-Indicus*)! Thy deep intimacy with our Krishna is sung in many a pastoral song and poetic legend. Both of you are so very lovely in appearance and in the possession of fine, red eyes and a silvery tongue. Like our beloved Krishna thou, O cuckoo, taketh delight in a congenial forest home, and art fond of delicious mango juice, even as He is fond of nectarious juices⁵⁹ that His devotees keep concealed for Him in their sweet... bosoms, aye, in the secret chambers of their heart. Thy sweet notes, O cuckoo, only serve to accentuate the plaintive cries of those who suffer from the pangs of the Lord's separation, and in this sense thou art as much a source of vexation to them as He is. Don't be so troublesome, O lovely cuckoo! Only unite us merrily with Him, for whom our heart is ailing and aching.

* *Tetrao Rufus; Perdix rufa* (Greek partridge).

56 खंजन 57 चकोर 58 कोकिल 59 सुन्दर रसन में लालसा.

and with whom thou art apparently so familiar.

This prayer goes unheeded by the cuckoo. Writhing under the load of sorrow one of the disappointed querists exclaims. "Oh, only those who really know what it is to be love-lorn can sympathise with us. Poor thing! Ignorant of the mysterious nature of Shri Krishna, the cuckoo does not know the secret of His love and fellowship⁶⁰ and is, therefore, so cold and unsympathetic." 'Her companions then press her to their bosom and ask 'Sister! Then where shall we find those who know Krishna's secrets and bear His impress?' Observing her scraping the ground under her feet with her toes, her mates, exultantly ejaculate, "Oh! we see Krishna's feet sanctify the earth wherever He goes. The wide world is His footstool and bears His impress. Oh! Let us appeal to this sacred earth if she would condescend to divulge His secret!"

"O Earth," they say, "what austerities hast thou performed that Keshav has rewarded thee by touching Thy bosom with His feet? Thou art gratified beyond measure and thy fresh face is so very lovely to look at. We see, that thy inward joy, is being revealed through thy transformed, charming face, with its rich verdure, infinite variety of trees and other beauties that are so wondrous and so pleasing. O earth! Tell us if thy gaiety is not all due to thy devotion to the Lord and thy association with His blessed feet. Or it may be that thou art happy in remembrance of the fact that the Lord lifted thee out of 'water' (the bog) even on His own lips, and on another occa-

sion measured thy whole extant space with a single step! Do tell us, O earth, what austerities like thine shall make us equally blessed?"

But who cares to disclose love's deepest secrets? The earth is supremely silent. A woman's heart, rich as it is in its intuitions, is quick to perceive facts particularly concerning her own sex. In their rambles in the woodland they observe a small herd of does happily grazing on the turf. 'One soft touch of nature makes the whole world kin.' That is true no doubt, but an all-embracing love - love of which the centre is Shri Krishna the glorious sun, who reflecting His love beams upon the whole of His creation is never satisfied with half-truths. What right has man, a mere biped, to exclude from the circle of his kinsfolk those who are in the unfortunate position of quadrupeds? It is this wider sense of kinship, coupled perhaps with sex love and sex glorification, that prompts the loving *Gopi souls* to address the does as their sisters. "Well, sisters, they ask, "Have ye not observed our Joe, the Immortal Shri Krishna, going this way, satisfying your fond gaze with His blissful appearance? If ye have, then, won't ye oblige us by showing to us the right way we should take to discover Him? It seems that He is not alone. He has in all probability in His blessed company, one whom he dearly^{*61} loves. For the

* The Sanskrit word in the Bhagwat is Priya प्रीया coupled with a subsequent verse in which she is spoken of as doing the Lord's *Aradhana* (आराधना) it should be taken to be the pivot on which whole story of Radha turns (भा-१०-३०: ११ तथा २८)

61 प्रीया.

sweet aroma of the *Kunda*⁶² (*Jasumin*), mixed with the fine penetrating odour of saffron, is pervading the whole atmosphere round about here and regaling our olfactory nerves – even the *Kunda*, of which our Pat loves to make a garland for Himself, and the coloured Saffron⁶³ with which a *belle* would fain adorn her breast. A nimble-footed doe takes fright and off it goes with rapid strides. The *Gopis* take it to be an invitation to them to follow her, fondly believing that she knows the way and is mercifully inclined to take them to Shri Krishna. The frightened doe, dreading its – pursuers frequently, glances round to see if she is out of harm's way. The *Gopis* take her side-glances to be the signal for them to hurry up. On they proceed with gigantic steps. The doe is still further alarmed and scampers out of sight. “Heigh ho”, they exclaim, “What has happened to our guide! She was just now in sight and has all of a sudden disappeared in the forest! It may be that our beloved Shri Krishna is hiding Himself somewhere here and the doe, too, fearing that the Lord will take her to task for showing Him up, has taken cover. The *Gopi souls* are still hopeful and full of faith. There is the fragrance that permeates the atmosphere. Other signs, too, are not wanting. The trees, with their drooping branches laden with fruits and flowers, indicate that they have just made their obeisance⁶⁴ to Shri Krishna.

So the Lord must have passed this way. “O trees”, they say, the lotus-eyed Shri Krishna with one of His hands resting upon the shoulder of some one dear⁶⁵ to

Him, and with the other waving a full blown lotus, with a host of bumble-bees swarming around Him, attracted and almost stupefied by the captivating smell of the basil (*Tulsi*), the self-same Krishna, has, it seems, looked sweet upon ye and observed ye all happy brood, making your obeisance! Has He not? Since your heads are still bending low, it seems He has not accepted your *pranam* (respectful obeisance). Perhaps, He has been too busy looking after His *Priya*, (His Angelina) and warding off the bumble-bees from over her face with the lotus. The bumble-bees, too, being in their native woods abounding in basil are after Shri Krishna. For, the basil, adoring His person, has greater attraction for them. With His fondness for basil (love incomparable) the Lord, too, must be somewhere round this wood, playing His games of love⁶⁶. The bumble bees are undoubtedly boozy,⁶⁷ almost blind and lacking discrimination. They can never be depended on as obliging sure guides. Let us ask these creepers that are climbing up the trees and holding them in tight embrace. Almost fresh and glowing, as if flushed with joy, it may be the Lord has touched them with His finger's ends. They are likely to give us a sure and certain clue to one who is All-love. That is how the *Gopi souls* apostrophise. But the creepers, being themselves in raptures, a state bordering on self-forgetfulness,⁶⁸ say nothing.

The heavenly-minded *Gopis*, the rapt ones, of the God like forehead, with their hearts centered in the Lord raving mad in His love and extremely uneasy in His search, give utterance to the rapturous music

of their soul in diverse strains. That is how they pour out their heart and give expression to their inmost feelings on the Jamuna ahead. "Ah, Sisters! Look at this Jamuna, the bonny immortal Kalindi⁶⁹ with her banks blooming so fresh and fair and defying decay,⁷⁰ *Bhanu-Nandini*,⁷¹ the offspring of Phoebus, surely she has spied our Lord, for He is light (Uriah). The ripples playing on her bright bosom bespeak her inward delight⁷² in having caught His glimpse. Out of joy she can't contain herself within her limits. Hence, it is that she is rolling backwards and forwards. A kind heart is more than a coronet they say, and the queenly Jamuna glories in the possession of one. Those who approach her, their troubles and sufferings vanish in no time. She is Shri Krishna's very loving and devoted consort. On the day of *Dooj*⁷³ (2nd day of the bright half of a lunar month), as the story runs, she feasted her brother *Yamraj*⁷⁴. Pleased with her hospitality, *Yamraj* offered her a boon. Jamuna would only accept a boon of her own choice. *Yamraj* agreed to give one. The sister begged of her brother. 'Whoever bathes in my waters, be he a sinner of the worst type, a reproach of men, and despised of the people, he shall not be molested by thy myrmidons, or taken to the infernal regions, the pale realms of shade, but shall be allowed to go direct to the realms above, even to *Vaikunth*⁷⁵. Thinking that he will become impotent and his dominion will be all gone by yielding entirely to this request, *Yamraj* wore an anxious look. Out of pity and in deference to the

69 कालिन्दी 70 यम-ना 71 भानुनन्दिनी 72 आल्हाद 73 दूज
74 यमराज 75 वैकुण्ठ धाम.

wishes of her brother, the sister confined her request for this act of grace to a single day of the year, i. e. whoever will take a midday dip in the sacred waters of the Jamuna on the day of *Bhayya Dooj*, in the bright half of the lunar month of *Kartik*, he shall not go to *Yama's Loka** (infernal regions). Such is the Divine Stream, the *Gopis* say. By this philanthropic act of hers Yamuna has benefitted the suffering humanity at the expense of her brother (*Yama*), who is ever ready to exact a toll from the overtaxed denizens of the world. Our sufferings, we doubt not, will move a kind heart like hers to pity, and we shall find her admirably frank, where others have been so reticent as not to breathe a syllable about Shri Krishna. In any case let us approach her. So all ask with one voice, 'O *Bhanu-Nandini* thou daughter of the Sun of Righteousness! O *Jamuna*! Gracious spouse of a gracious Lord! We have measured many a mile wandering hither and thither in His quest, with His name on our lips, and our hearts fondly turned to Him with ceaseless pain.

We have seen hours dreadful and things strange; but this sore night hath trifled former knowings.

See we are gathered here from the four corners of

* *Yama* and *Dharma* are synonymous; *Dharmaraj* confers immorality or death according as a man is righteous or unrighteous, his dealings being all fare and square. Divine Love is almost akin to righteousness. A bath in the waters of Divine Love confers immortality. Condition precedent to such a bath is an essential purity of mind. Hence the significance of '*Kartik*' '*Dooj*' implies an understanding between the two, *Yama* and *Yamuna*. The significance of 'Lunar half' is apparent. A pure mind is likened to the moon.

Braja to implore thee to be mercifully kind to us. Thou alone can'st put an end to our toil and turmoil by revealing to us our loving Shri Krishna."

This appeal, too, meets the fate of the rest and the *Gopi souls* cry out in despair, "Oh! She, too, is jealous of us, considering us to be her rivals, her partners in the bed of Love Divine. She will by herself enjoy the sweet fellowship of the good Lord. What does she care for us and what good treatment we maids can expect from her when her own brother *Yamraj*, whom she wished to deprive of his kingdom did not fare better at her hands?"

The earnest questants have left no stone unturned in seeking the Lord. They have ransacked the woods and pried into every nook and corner. The panorama round them has not escaped their close scrutiny. They have interrogated everything they have come across not omitting live trees and plants, birds and beasts, and the passing phenomena that interpret the Lord for His loved ones and the best of devotees. It seems as if the whole of creation has joined in a conspiracy of silence against them. They wrongly imagine that all have sealed their lips, only to smite them, not knowing perhaps that

"long is the way
and hard, that leads up to light."

The inquisitorial, outward search has tired them. The love of the Lord is deeply ingrained in their very heart. Love's intoxicating potion has rendered them almost stark, staring mad. A heart, so possessed, the good Lord shapes after His own mould The tranfigura-

tion, that corresponds to the pure inward controlling thoughts is the more complete, the more we think of Him. It is no wonder, then, that, the *Gopi Souls*, who love to dwell constantly upon Shri Krishna, find themselves for the nonce transformed, as if it were, into an image of the Lord and seated high on the banks of the Jamuna, begin to imitate His actions and sports⁷⁷.

The part of Pootna and Yashoda is taboo for the *Gopi souls*, who look upon the Lord as their very husband. An improvised agency, call it 'fancied Yogamaya' if you please, here intervenes to play their part and one of the *Gopis*, acting the part of Krishna, sucks Pootna's breast*. Another *Gopi soul* assumes the role of Shaktasur and makes a complete somersault when kicked by her namesake, who represents Krishna. Yet another, after the peculiar inordinate fashion of *Trinavarta*,⁷⁸ whirls round and round like a whirl-blast, inflected, perhaps, at having a *Gopi* in her arms, whom she

* Our mind if it is pure, cannot even in its forgetful moments behave like a beast which means the same thing as playing the wretched part of *Pootna*. Hence the little apparent discrepancy between this description and that given in the original *Bhagwat Puran*. (भा-१० ३०-११ से २३). It all, however, depends, on one's brain record. By the previous and present record of the Lord's doings, that appertain to one's inner self, are reproduced by the brain-plate, then the behaviour of the *Gopi soul* cannot but be as stated in the *Bhagwat puran*, but this can only be true in the case of those whose previous record is such as to necessitate the destruction of the 'Monsters' within them, but not in the case of maids (बिरजस) whose brain-plate is believed to be very clean.

77 लीला क्रीडा 78 तृणवर्त.

takes for the child Krishna. One from among their midst, with merry bells worn on her ankles toddles and crawls on the ground after the manner of the infant Shri Krishna and at intervals turns round and round, perhaps rapt and inspired by the Divine music she makes. The Gopis likewise feelingly play the part of Sri Krishna, Balram and their companions in many a boyish game in which Batsasur⁷, Bakasur⁸, and others of their ilk meet their well merited deserts. One of the *Gopis* Krishna-wise plays on the flute. Good many others cattle-wise flock to her from far and near no sooner they hear the sound of the flute, while the rest applaud them to the very echo, crying "hurrah," (*wah-wah*) the whole place resounding with their merry shouts. Another *Gopi*, whose mind is indissolubly linked to Krishna, steps forward, with one of her hands resting on the shoulders of a companion of hers, and walking gracefully, pleads with a gracious voice, 'Look here! I am Krishna! How lovely and charming is my personality! I will protect ye all. Don't be afraid of wind and rain. I am going to employ an expedient to deliver ye from harm.' So saying, one of their number promptly improvises a 'Govardhan' of her wearing apparel and raises it aloft in the same way as Krishna lifted the 'Govardhan'. Yet another, placing her foot on the forehead of a Protuberance, taking it for Kalia, upraids it thus, "get thee gone! O thou wretch of a viper! Know that my advent in this world is for punishing the wicked!" 'Another solemnly gets up and vociferates, 'O ye milkmen! Look at this huge conflagration!

gration⁸¹. It is spreading fast. Don't be terror-stricken. Only shut your eyes, and I will easily save ye from the impending danger' Two of the *Gopis* represent themselves to be *Agathodaemons*, turned into *Yamalarjuna*, a pair of *Terminalia Arjuna*, symbolic of bright, glistening eyes, whose immodesty reduces their owners through the curse of their own conscience, to the position of mere immobile creation, may be, mere block-heads. Another rapturist, Krishna-like (gifted with the mind's eye) gets herself tied with garlands improvised into a rope 'to a mortar'⁸² and hiding her face, looks as if she was abashed. Presently she crawls on the ground and gradually gets between the pair of 'Arjunas'. Lo! the metamorphosis; the eyes' wanton look of indecorum disappears and down drop the lids, their owners' block-head nature is removed through Vision Divine and once more they regain their position as 'a noble pair of brothers' in the rank of divinities, even the position of '*Servus Servorum Dei*' (a servant of the servants of God)!

The *Gopi Soul* bear the impress of the Lord on their hearts and their love for their amiable 'Ami' knows no bounds. They are at once the crown and glory of the cult of *bhakti* and typify in themselves the acme of single-minded devotion and ardent love, that one should bear for the Lord. Themselves the prototypes of devotion, the world has yet to learn at their feet the A. B. C. of Godly love, self-sacrificing faith, piety, reverance and all that constitutes *Bhakti*. Mark their complete self-effacement in the Lord! The type

of devotee, whose love for the Lord borders on ecstasy, is rare. Being en rapport, the devotee assumes a divine role and takes delight in performing His *leela*, in blessing as He blesses, in playing as He plays and in serving as He serves. Such is always the case with those, who are completely under the spell of devotion, and such has been the case with the *Gopis*. The strings of their heart are in the hands of a Master-Musician, who brings sweet music out of them. He is with them and yet apparently out of sight. While the *Gopis* are looking for Him, their Beloved is out with one forsooth a *Gopi*, yet most maidenly and a model for the rest, hence, nearest and dearest to the Lord, who would fain keep her next to His heart and make her like Himself, worthy of the world's adoration for all time to come. She has been idealised as Radha – a name imperishable, acquiring fresh lustre as ages roll by, since the eternal Lord has chosen her to share with Him, His eternal fame and glory. She adored the Lord and was herself adored in turn. In loving and adoring the Lord none can match her. Hence, the significance of the name Radha, Aradha. She is the type of the super-devotee, whom the Lord loves to make His counterpart. In the annals of the love-play of *bhakti*, Shri Radha figures as such, and her name is coupled with the Lord's in the religious phraseology of *Rasiks*, – a term used for the followers of this school of thought and for all those who love to look upon the Lord as their affable companion in love divine. Yet there are Vaishnavas in whose heart, Shri Radha, occupies the first and the foremost place; and the writer shall have an occasion to dilate on this topic later. All this has been written

only to elucidate an obscure point and to bring into marked relief the spirit of the love-play. Leave out the wedded, consecrated soul, namely Shri Radha, and the love-play loses almost all its charm.

गधे तू बड़ भागिनी, कौन तपस्या कीन ।
तीन लोक तारन तरन, है तेरे आशीन ॥

Great is your fortune, Oh Radha, that you have captured the Master of three worlds. May I know what penances and austerities you have undergone.

The Lord does catch hold of the hands of His devotee-of one who is the most dear to Him, (His *bien-amie*) and whispers into her ears, 'Wilt thou be mine or not?' On a positive answer to this question of questions depends the secret relationship that springs up between the two, the soul and the Oversoul. Well, when the Lord is with us the world looks brighter in our eyes. 'Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows.' The running brook sings its lullaby, the green grass invites us for recreation and rest, the budding flowers exchange glances with us and the morning breeze is lavish in bestowing on us her sweet-smelling kisses. The overindulgent Lord Shri Krishna being with her, His Agnes loiters among the woods, sometimes looking at this flower, sometimes at that, admiring their delicate shades and fine odours. Every bit of ground looks picturesque in her sight, for, the great Pageant-painter, who unlocks the flowers to paint the longing soil, Himself shows it to her. That is not all. The least trouble or inconvenience that happens to her disconcerts Him. If her tentatizing, dishevelled locks of hair get tangled up, there is the Lord present to distangle them. If she is sensitive and keen on dress-

ing beautifully⁸³ her person, the Lord would insist on doing it Himself to make her look all the more lovely and pretty. Why, to exalt her the Lord would even lend His own looks, dress her embrosial curls⁸⁴ and be unto her a mirror. If she stumbles, there is the Lord present beside her to lift her up. The great Lover and the loved⁸⁵ one are thus enjoying themselves in silent, sequestered woods in sweet communion, that shuns all noise and disturbance. "Hush! The *Gopis* are approaching!" So saying they move forward unobserved.

Presently the *Gopis* arrive upon the scene and observe the footprints of their beloved Shri Krishna. In them there are to be found traces of the inimitable lotus;⁸⁶ the circular disc⁸⁷ the destroyer of foes—even the foes of the spirit; the flag⁸⁸ and the hook,⁸⁹ from which they conclude that the footmarks are assuredly those of their Love *Nanda-Nandan*. For, are not the Lord's feet adorned with these marks, marks that are respectively indicative of His blessed felicity, His universal rule that knows of no antagonist, His triumph over the forces of evil, and His controlling power? As they follow the traces, they are astonished to find side by side with them marks of the footprints of one of their own sex, fairboding and fair. Ah! whose footmarks are these? Who is she whom the Lord has taken with Him? Evidently she is the most fortunate. For, from the mixing of their footprints it appears that she has made Shri Krishna her prop, and walks at a lordly pace with her hands resting on His shoulders. Undoubtedly she

83 श्रृंगार 84 बेनी गूँथना 85 प्रिया-प्रियतम 86 पद्म 87 चक्र
88 ध्वज 89 अकुश.

must be happy in His company. Thus, they say to one another. Their hearts bleed to find themselves thus ignored. But then they soliloquize. "The Beautiful One, Who is the solace of His devotees and looks to the fulfilment of their heart's longings and desires, Him we have not so earnestly adored⁹⁰ as she has done. She makes it a point to study carefully the Lord's wishes and cheerfully abides by them. Therefore, it is that the Lord has turned His back on us all and, considering her to be the fit object of His sanctifying grace, has so graciously chosen to befriend her. Her good fortune has trampled ours under foot. Pearls simply blush before a diamond. Who can henceforth boast of being more lucky (blessed) than she is? Getting the start of us all, she has made our beloved Lord her own and snatching Him from our midst, has gone with Him into seclusion, preferring to commune with Him alone! Thus foiled and stultified, what shall we do?" The more considerate of the lot say "Oh no! The fault cannot be hers. She must have been eagerly wooed by the Lord, who alone is to blame. He is the Arch-Wooer."⁹¹

The bereaved *Gopi Souls*, thus, bemoan their lot and say, "This dust of the Lord's feet is extremely sanctified and blessed, for, it is coveted even by Brahma, Mahadeva and Lakshmi for their own sanctification. Let us do the same. We shall thereby surely attain the Lord. Then they address the sacred earth. "Ah blessed dust! The blissfull Lord, treading on thee, must have imparted His own *anand* (bliss) to thee. How could'st

thou otherwise be so patient and forbearing even when trodden under the heels of others? Thou art infinitely better than us. Thou art the solace of the sick and the sorrow-stricken hearts. We envy thy luck. The traces of the Lord's lotus feet, mixed with those of His adoring Athena, tempt and tease us a bit too much. Leaving us all in the lurch, she has sought the solitude of the woods to commune with Him alone and appropriate all to herself His sweet nectar,⁹¹ to which we are equally entitled. It seems she has got a great hold on the heart of the Immortal and Eternal Friend, the Fountain-head of Love, Shri Krishna."

Going a little farther they do not observe her footprints and explain, "Lo! Here the traces of her feet are missing. It appears that prickly pebbles and thorns, that infest this forest-ground, have made her feet sore and painful. And the Lord, out of tender regard for her suffering, has taken her up on His shoulders". And we cannot be wrong in our inference. For, see here (at some distance off) the loving Lord's tender feet seem to sink in the ground under His load. He has evidently taken off His *fiancee* and rising on the foremost part of His feet, of which yonder ground bears an impress, has plucked flowers for her toilet and these marks down here show the posture.⁹³ He has evidently assumed a pose to trim and plait⁹⁴ her love locks."⁹⁵

Let not the cynic and the sceptic knit their brows and cavil at these games. Love, which is unselfish

* Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him.

92 प्रेम सुधा 93 उकस 94 बेनी गुद्दी 95 त्रेन्ती .

altruistic, can rise to any possible peak. And where it does admit of flagitious conduct, it ceases to be altruistic. Tender thoughts have to be clothed in delicate expressions. One should, therefore beware of distorting these expressions for his own ends. It is to be remembered that the subtle language of the soul is at best metaphorical. Moreover, the Lord is *Atmaram*,⁹⁶ spirit communing with his own spirit. We call Him *Purna Kam*,⁹⁷ self-satisfied too. That being so, how can the light-winged toys of feathered cupid, to use the language of poetry—'seal with wanton dulness His (the Anteros') speculative and officed instruments?' Yet He is our Wooer and if we want to rise — and rise we must — to the height of love transcendent, our human viewpoint must be discarded for that of divine, and all flippant and frivolous attitude in this matter of the Oversoul, (Holy spirit) intercourse with the soul should be abandoned.

Well, the enraptured questants, *Gopis*, forgetful of their bodies⁹⁸ but with souls watchful, guided by the Lord's footsteps, and showing His traces to one another, go about the wood in quest of their beloved Joel. Meanwhile, the Jedediah, whom the Lord has been gracious enough to admit into His fellowship, lavishing on her His love, and conferring on her the privilege of a sacred and solemn communion in solitude with its attendant blessings, is supercilious enough to think that she is in some way supereminent. For, has not the good Lord deemed her worthy of this privilege in preference to the rest of the *Gopi souls*, who are equally worthy and imbued with His love in an extra ordinary

degreed? So proudly imagining that The One, whose affections the whole world shares is hers alone and does her bidding, she thus addresses Him: "Lord! I have come with Thee so far on foot. Now I can walk no farther. I am so tired. Lift me pray, on Thy shoulders." The Lord bent Himself low, but the moment she began to mount He made Himself invisible. Overwhelmed with grief she rolls on the ground. Lo! She swoons. It is the dead of night. Bountiful nature has made the green ground for her as soft as it could possibly be. It is all emerald green⁹⁹ with a play of colours over bits of ground here and there, which make them appear as if they were set with diamonds, rubies, amethysts, topaz and sapphires. The languid eyes of all lovers of nature cannot but have that sort of impression on looking at the landscape; all round embellished as it is with the beds of roses, the *motia*¹⁰⁰ (the pearly *Jasminum Sambac*) the exotic, white lilies¹ and the beautiful henna² plant (*Lawsonia alba*). Like a flowering plant that fades and falls, there she lies on a green sward, deprived of her golden flush. When she recovers herself a bit, she, touchingly laments thus: 'My Lord!³ My Beloved!⁴ Wooer of my soul!⁵ My protector!⁶ Where hast Thou gone? My Friend!⁷ I am Thy helpless⁸ maid-servant.⁹ Do come to me. Thou art the Lord of my life. Thus separated from Thee I feel as if the life within me is failing! Thy sustaining hand alone can revive me. Oh! Let me see Thee once face to face, before it is all

99 मकर्त मणि की भूमि 100 मोतिया 1 शुल फिरंग 2 मेंहदी
3 हाथ नाथ 4 हे प्रियतम 5 हे रमण 6 महाबाहो 7 सखे 8 दीन
9 दासी .

over with me! See, the heart within me is sinking! I rise only to make an impertinent request to Thee. But for that, I am sure, Thou would'st not have deserted me. I am sorry that I should have made myself so unaccommodating and disagreeable to Thee, so dear and precious as Thou art. If I were blessed with a thousand lives, O Thou my Life's Breath, I would sacrifice them all for Thee, O forgive me and stretch Thy arms to embrace me! Do make me feel Thy nearness and banish my grief. Thou art near, but I don't see Thee. Is it because I have wept my spirit out of my eyes or my vision is blurred by tears of repentance? Or is it because the smoky fire of Thy separation is enveloping me like a dark cloud and rendering me purblind? However, my soul has severed and is awaiting Thy vision beatific, before quitting this earthly tenement. O Illuminer of my soul! Accursed is the night, which is dark and moonless! The lotus is sure to fade if it does not receive the sun's rays. The soul¹⁰ that, deprived of the Lord,¹¹ still clings to the body is no less accursed. O Lord, whatever is pleasing in Thy sight, is worth having. Of what use to me is all else besides? Vile and worthless as I am, I am Thine. O Thou, the Great Healer of my soul's angularities, and the centre of my deepest affections, forbear with my faults and bless me with Thy vision beatific!"

A heart-rending wail this – call it prayer if you please – emanating from a ravished and contrite heart! The prayer over, the rapturous, prayerful soul, hardly able to bear the Lord's separation, again lapses into a

state of trance. The maiden questers, happening to pass that way, notice from a distance something bright and sparkling, aye, a

“beauty which, whether waking or sleep,
Shot forth peculiar graces,”

“Is she a heavenly nymph, a celestial being,¹² a queen of glory or glorious love personified? Bright, yet motionless! It may be a golden lotus, a garland of Jasmine or diamonds, a saffron-bed, a dragon’s pearl,¹³ even the veritable moon¹⁴ or the pearl that outshines the lunar orb¹⁵ in its splendour, or, lightning itself, illuminating the whole space! What! Do our eyes deceive us? What do we see ahead?” They go on, thus, postulating. As they arrive on the spot, they find her to be their own dear lovelorn, Radhika. A wail goes up from their hearts. “Oh! She, too, has been forsaken by the Lord. Who will not call Him loveless after this?” To let her recover her consciousness, some of them fan her with lotus leaves; some one ties up her dislevelled hair into a knot; another wipes off the sweat of her face. Lo! She slowly awakes, her cheeks begins to glimmer and she bursts into tears. “My Lord! Where hast Thou gone, forsaking me?” That is the cry on her lips. The *Gopis* are simply dumbfounded to hear from her lips the story of her loving communion with the Supreme Lord, Shri Krishna, the love and esteem in which she is held by Him and how through her own fault—the fault of egotism—her esteem is made much the poorer by her losing the Good Lord.

12 देव-कन्या 13 सर्प की मणि 14 चन्द्रकान्त मणि 15 चन्द्रकान्त मणि.

To look for the Lord the *Gopis*, guided by the light of the moon, penetrate the woods¹⁶ as far as they can, but on seeing dense thickets ahead, where the light fails them, they return. Probably they are under the impression that their beloved Lord does not love darkness; and even if He ventures into the dark, He will find His way blocked by thorns and brambles that infest these thickets. Love and light go hand in hand. One cannot divorce light from love. A longing soul that seeks light has to shun dense, bewildering forests of error and ignorance. But the stubborn critic, too apt to flout at these things, may ask, what room is there for darkness in God's own Brindaban (the abode of love divine), the abode of the blessed maiden souls, the ground whereof is inlaid with illumining pearls, diamonds and jewels is ever flooded with the light of the full moon? He forgets that the *Gopis* are looking for the Good Lord Himself, the source of all light. So long as His light illumines their onward path, the questants go about in search of Him, but when this diligent search proves fruitless and their Immortal Enlightener, they feel, does not condescend to show His bright, effulgent face to them, the tired questers, shorn of His grace, find that it is all pitch dark before them. It is an experience. All seekers, who tread the Lord's path and search for Him with the earnestness and devotion of a *Gopi*, will vouch for, as true.

None of the *Gopis* return to their homes. And why should they? It is their dearest Krishna, who looms largely in their thoughts, words and actions. Being

wholly absorbed in talking of the Lord and in performing His *leela*, (play) they lose their identity in Him and all thought of home and the objective world vanishes from their minds.

The soul moves in a circle. The questers return to the spot from which they had commenced their search—aye the spot on the banks of the Jamuna, where nature has provided for them a velvety bed of 'suppressed' cushy stuff, whereon they can muse to their heart's content, and pray for the return of One, who is the Beloved of their soul.

"Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother number flows."

The combined music, coupled with the sweet strains of their own measured verses in which they adore their Lord, helps to revive their fast drooping spirits, exhausted and worn-out as they are by the search. It is the spot where their dearest Lord, the sustainer of their heart-strings, has chosen to separate Himself from them and here they hope to meet Him again. "If our toilsome wanderings have rendered us so faint and out of heart, surely our Lord," they imagine, "Who is not made of iron, also must have been feeling Himself equally fed up. Moreover, the more we are after Him the more He eludes our persistent search. If we stick to one place, i. e. (the heart's centre), He will come of Himself." That is also one of the considerations that makes them retrace their steps, back to the centre from which they have pursued their quest. You may knock your head against the wall, you may try a thousand means, yet you can't catch hold of One,

who chooses to remain behind the screen, by running after Him. When we restrain our wandering mind and our feverish haste by a process of introspection, it settles down into a reposeful calm. It then resists all sensual indulgence. The Lord, Who because of our shortcomings so long eludes our grasp of Himself, enters the silent chamber of our heart, and embraces us there. Neither the trees, nor even their branches and leaves have escape the closest scrutiny of the *Gopi souls*. They assiduously knock about from wood to wood that their physical frames undergo to a sore test. Their faces evidently bear the marks of biting pangs; their hearts experience trials which do not benumb their spirit, so ardent and watchful, in the least. It is as true of our maiden *Gopi-souls* as of the poet who says --

“As still to the star of its worship, though clouded,
The needle points faithfully O'er the dim sea,
So dark when I roam in this wintry world shrouded,
The hope of my spirit turns trembling to Thee.”

Way worn and jaded, almost fainting with dire fatigue, they are yet hopeful and full of faith. Here they are seated on the banks of the Jamuna, musing over their experiences and anxiously looking forward to the coming of the Lord. The least noise startles them. Be it a slight hum or a tick, it tickles their auditory nerves and they are all ears! They begin to feel the Lord's way and, straining their eyes anxiously, look for Him in all directions. None can fathom their heart's impulses, that ebb and flow like the huge, tossing ocean-waves. God has possessed their heart of hearts and their feelings are no longer under their con-

trol. "If our Beloved meets us but once, we shall tie our feet to His with silver links and silken ties and keep Him fastened, heart to heart and mind to mind", this, is the thought that comes to their mind. "Oh, we shall surround Him on all sides, take Him, by the hands and shall never let go our hold of Him"—this is another. Lively feelings stir their breasts. Their hearts swell with fervour and tears trickle down their cheeks, as they, in sweet expectation of meeting the good gracious Lord, muse and meditate, seated like true *Yoginis*, give vent to their inmost thoughts in a song:

"Sisters! What shall we do? Where shall we go to? These eyes of ours won't be satisfied unless they see the sweet-looking face of the Lord. Nothing now appears pleasing in our sight; father, mother, family, home and all that makes it sweet, even riches, of which people are so fond, have lost their charm for us. He alone remains in sole possession of our heart and soul. When we go to bed, when we rise, whether it is night or day, when we move about, here, there and everywhere we think of Him. Try as we may, our minds, eyes can never even for a moment lose sight of Him, Who is so lovely! Our beloved Lord, our life's only treasure, the true sustainer of our heart-strings, figures in all our thoughts and actions. He rules our minds and bodies and we look upon Him and His grace as all our wealth, but, sisters, we don't know the workings of His mind and the measure of His love for us."*

*सखी हम कहा करें कित जायँ ।

बिन देखे वह मोहिनि मूरत, नैनी नाहि अवाँयँ ॥१॥

That is how the deep-musing *Gopi souls* commune with themselves and give expression to the fine thoughts they cherish for their *Chief*, ideal object of their love, their all in all. "Of what use is this body to us when He has robbed us of our soul, by placing the halter of His love round our necks?" They cogitate. "With the Ideal Charmer of our hearts, the Feeder of our flame, hiding His face from us, we don't mind if this burdensome body with its heavy load of care is struck by lightning or done to death by hailstones!"

Devout souls never lack inspiration. The *Gopi* souls finding these pensive meditations of no avail, engage themselves in deep, incessant and heartfelt prayer, knowing perhaps, intuitively that deep longings bring about their own fulfilment in due course. Their prayer is clothed in a fine celestial song called *Gopika Git*,¹⁷ in which the pious, God-smitten *Gopi souls* ardently invoke the Lord and sing His praises¹⁸ with all the fervour of their hearts.

It is one of the Lord's sayings, recorded as a sacred text. The sage Narada, conscience incarnate, God's chief instrument for conveying the inspired word¹⁹ to -

कछु न रुहान धाम धन गृह सुख, मात पिता परिवार ।
 बसत एक हिय में उनकी छाँव, औरन नवै बिसार ॥२॥
 बैठत उठत शयन सोवत निशि, चलत फिरत सब ठौर ।
 नैनन तै वह रूप रसीली, टरत न इक पल और ॥३॥
 हमरे तौ तन मन धन प्यारे, मन बच क्रम चित माहि ।
 ये उनके मन की गति सजनी, जान परत कछु नाहि ॥४॥

17 गोपीकागीत 18 हरिभक्त गान. 19 नाद.

the mortals, ergo, is an ideal type of a devotee. The Lord's abode is accessible to him, as to no one else, yet he has to knock about sometimes in search of the Lord. To make sure, he questions the Lord and receives the reply. The Good Lord says, 'However much I am worshipped by Lakshmi, yet heaven,²⁹ O Narada, is not the place where one should seek me. I am sought after by *Yogis* and others of their like*, who do penance for me, but I am not fond of a place in their hearts either. Know, O Narada, that I am bound to my *bhaktas* (devotees) by most affectionate ties. Wherever they, heart and soul, sing my songs in concert, it is there that I dwell.'**

* There is a long list of them. There are ascetics who, perhaps, subsist on air alone वातासहारी or water जलाहारी and air, and those who subsist on edible roots and leaves पणहारी, or stew themselves by lighting up *Panchagni* पंचाग्नि under a blazing sun (rather four fires, the fifth being the heat of the sun). Then there are those who have renounced the world and live more or less a life of seclusion. सन्यासी, गिरी, भार्खी; उदासी, परमहंस, दंडी, त्रिदंडी There are reputed *Aghoris* अघोरी too who have lost their repugnance for all abnoxious things; *Munis*, who keep a vow of silence, *Jatis* (Celibates); *Urdhva-bahu*, उर्ध्वबाहु who scorch their limbs into disuse; *Bairagis*, for whom the world of care has lost all attraction, a class of whom besmear their - bodies with ashes; and *Jatadhari*, जटाधारी who distort their hair out of shape and consider it a sacrilege to shave or dress them properly.

**नाहं वसामि बैकुण्ठे, योगिनां हृदये च ।

मद् भक्ता यत्र गायन्ति, यत्र तिष्ठामि नारद ॥

20 बैकुण्ठ.

Acting in the spirit of this text, the *Gopi souls* most devoutly chant the Lord's praises, and the celestial song of prayer they sing, ranks as one of the most beautiful among the various songs that are to be found in *Srimad Bhagwata Purana*.'

CHAPTER III

GOPIKA GEET

The *Gopis* pray thus:— “Since the day of Thy happy advent O Lord, this Brijā of ours has acquired a wonderful name and a fame of its own. Thy splendid bounties have been showered upon it in abundance and the land is now virtually flowing with milk and honey. Lakshmi, too, has enhanced its reputation by making it her permanent²¹ abode and Thy shining presence has made it the brightest spot under the blue vault of heaven. But see, O Jove,²² these Thy unhappy maid-servants, ever at Thy beck and call, for whom Thou art the very breath of their life,²³ whom Thy separation has made so very miserable and disconsolate, are in this spot looking for Thee in all directions. If death has not so far overtaken them, it is because their life-breath is centered in Thee.”

They continue:

“Our life being in Thy keeping, the Angel of death had to turn away disappointed from our doors.* But how can we survive without Thee and what shall we do with this wretched earthly tenement *minus* its life-springs? Oh! Do restore our life to us by revealing to us Thy beaming countenance and grant that inner

*प्राण तुम्हारे पास, याही ते जीवन भयो

यम फिर गयो निरास, तन हूँडयो पायो नहिं

21 निरंतर 22 प्रियतम 23 जीवन प्राण

light, that would make Thee perceptible to our spiritual intuitions.

“O Thou, the *Ravisher*²⁴ of our souls! Thy bright, chastened pretty eyes, it seems, have adopted the profession of a burglar since they have robbed the fine, full-blooming lotuses²⁵ that come out during the autumn²⁶ of all the beauty²⁷ inherent in their bulbs.²⁸ They have played the same robbers' game with us, too. We may be cheap as dust in Thine eyes, for, Thou had'st not had to open Thy purse-strings and pay a single farthing for securing us as Thy willing, obedient *mangaris* (maidservants). Admitted that Thou hast got us for a mere song, but that does not give Thee *carte blanche* to do what Thou liketh with us! Thou hast left with us nothing that we can call our own. Oh! it is not with one thief that we have to deal. There are many that are round about Thee. First, Thy flute played havoc with us by entering stealthily through the side-door of our ears. Subsequently, Thy soft smiles quietly penetrated the silent chamber of our heart. They robbed us of our precious jewels, aye, our wit and wisdom. Again, Thy quint glances, so killing, are, to all intents and purposes, not a whit less than a band of burglars. Lying in ambush, they caught us unawares and killed us, outright. Is this not women slaughter, downright butchery? Is it truly becoming on Thy part to behave thus? If not, how canst Thou expiate for it, but by unmasking Thyself and infusing fresh life into us? Oh, we ask of Thee a gift of fresh and renewed life, which is the necessary concomitant of Thy vision beatific!”

"Glorious²⁹ and worshipful Lord! Great and dreadful have been the calamities from which Thou hast saved us often. It was Thou Who preserved us from the deadly effects of 'poisoned water' that we had unconsciously drunk on one occasion. From the jaws of *Aghasur*³¹ (the monster of sin), who dragon like had devoured us, from *Batsasur*³¹ (the varitable wolf, we should say, masquerading as a lamb); from *Baumasur*³² son of *Mayasur*³³ (the Arch-foe, who would fain rule over the three worlds) Thou didst rescue us, from wind and storm and Indra's rage and numerous other perils. Thou didst deliver us. Then why dost Thou hesitate to put an end to our present sufferings?"

"The *Gopi souls* dote upon Thee and fondly look upon Thee as the supreme source of blessed felicity and call Thee their heart's delight. But surely Thou art more than that. Thou art the Universal favourite; nay the soul of the Universe, Omniscient, and Imminent in all that exists. Friend!³⁴ Brahma prayed for the deliverance of the world³⁵ and Thou didst accordingly make Thyself manifest in the family of *Yadavas*³⁶ (Celebrates). They are distinguished at once, over and above all others, by their virtuous conduct and purity of mind. Thou being our beloved Lord, the Soul of our souls, since we have dedicated ourselves to Thy service, Whom shall we look up to, but to Thee for the fulfilment of our soul's longings?"

"O Thou great and glorious among the *Yadavas*!³⁷ Afflicted people, foiled in the world's fight, when fright-

29 हे श्रेष्ठ 30 अघासुर 31 बत्सासुर 32 ब्योमासुर 33 मयासुर
34 सखे 35 विश्व 36 यादव 37 यदुकुलतिलक.

ened out of their wits, sincerely seek the shelter of Thy blessed feet. With open arms Thou embraceth them, making them calm and steady³⁸ and vouchsafing all that their hearts yearn for. O Thou Who art most lovesome and lovable! The very same hands, with which Thou hast grasped Lakshmi and made her Thine own, do Thou, we beseech Thee, place on our foreheads!"

"O Thou, the Solace of our drooping hearts, the sheet-anchor of shipwrecked souls of Braja! O mightiest of the mighty³⁹ heroes, gallant and Intrepid, before whom the old Enemy tumbles in dust! O Friend!⁴⁰ The pride, engendered in the heart of Thy devotees is dispelled at once by Thine sweet smiles. Ah! Where is the need, then for Thy seeking cover and hiding Thyself from our sight? It is hardly chivalrous on Thy part to do so. We are *dadies* - Thy maidservants! Pray accept us as such. We do not ask of Thee any wages in return. Only reveal to us Thy radiant face, the face which illumine all."

"Thy blessed feet, the happy resort of all lowly and sincere souls, wipe out their sins in no time. Thy feet that guide the cattle, 'Thine own flock' straying in the woods to their destination. Thy feet that repress the Arch foe of humanity, the old serpent Kali, keeping it down from rearing its hood⁴¹ over which they so gloriously and playfully dance. Even the lotus-feet that are adored and worshipped by Lakshmi, Oh do stretch them towards us for a while, that we might place them on our bosom and thereby tame the flame, which

is so fiercely burning in our heart! Thy feet, we know are always in the hearts of your lovers."

"Would it not be then, cruel on Thy part to deny us this privilege? Would they be defiled by our touch? Oh no, rather they purify the heart and purge it of its impurities, themselves remaining inviolate. Are we really so hard-hearted that Thy feet, so tender, are likely to be bruised? Oh no. Flexible and yielding as they are, they have traversed the woods, unmindful of thorns and thickets, stones and pebbles, and what matters it to them, even if our hearts be of stone! Are we in any way detracting from the inestimable worth of Thy lotus-feet, the blessed feet that are the repository of all that is good and glorious? Oh no. All the greater glory to them since Lakshmi humbles herself before them. Good and estimable as they are, they do not mind even the touch of a venomous serpent, much less should they fight shy of us and our hearts. Surely no poison is lurking within us. Are we really asking of Thee a bit too much? Dancing may be a laborious feat, but what trouble is it to Thee in simply extending this slight boon to us. In so doing we do hope Thou won't mind conversing with us for a while and assuring us that Thou art not in any way displeased with us, and that the golden links of love, that bind Thee to us are ever secure, never to be severed on any pretence whatsoever."

"O Lotus-eyed one! We Thy maidservants are enamoured of Thy sweet and melodious words,⁴² that

rain nectar and ravish the hearts of the learned and the wise, - even the words that inspire and

“Have power to assuage

The tumours of a trouble'd mind.”

“Oh! Do instil into us a few drops of that life giving nectar of Thy lips which, we are sure, will reanimate our lives, tumbled down as we are!”

“Lord! Blessed are the devout people of holy intent. They alone propound and understand the purport of Thy Word life⁴³ giving and nectarious as it is and expatiate upon it. This Word about which, divine bards so delightfully sing praises. The sweet miraculous Word that sobers down all dispirited and fidgety souls, high wrought by the world's fever-heat, enlivens and ennobles them, driving dull care away! Being sweet and delectable, it surely revivifies them as nothing else can. Oh! It thrills the hearts of hearers, purifies their thoughts and actions and tends to their well-being, breathing peace and harmony, turning erring souls from sin and wiping off their old scores. Verily, this task of propounding and explaining the Word,⁴⁴ devolves upon those, who have done meritorious deeds in their previous lives. The nectar of the gods may make men immortal, but the relish, the Word of Thy lips, pours out O Lord, has more mysterious thrill, since it works wonders in our lives and makes our destiny. It turns evil into good and ugliness into beauty, making even old, unregenerate squaws appear as if they were maids of sixteen summers.”

“Lord! It is not that we are only anxious to hear Thy inspiring Word from Thy lips alone, but we sincerely long for Thy vision too.

“O trapper of our souls!⁴⁵ Thy well-meaning, loving glances, that flash before our mind's eyes the moment we meditate on Thee, Thy sweet communion,⁴⁶ Thy words of so love charming, so touching, whispered into our hearts in seclusion, and Thy delightful sports⁴⁷

.....“That witchingly

Instil a wanton sweetness through the breast.”

A remembrance of all these makes it difficult for us at this moment to control our heart's feelings; and a foretaste of them makes us, Thy maids, yearn for Thy presence in our midst!

“Lord! Our hearts are seldom at ease when we think of Thy troubles suffered for the sake of others, whom Thou loveth so well, even the dumb driven cattle, whom Thou followeth in the dreary woods through thick and thin, both over bank and bush, the whole day long recovering and leading them to the right path, whenever they are lost or go astray. Therefore, it is that our impatient mind so often quarrels with us over the extreme possibility of bristling grass, sharp-edged pebbles and thorns, lodging in Thy pretty tender feet – more tender than the lotus – to prick and sting Thee, when Thou art after the cattle, Thy precious flock, roaming the wilds and woods of Braja! When we say, ‘Why does the Good Lord repair to the

thick woods at all and worry Himself, in case there are thorns that prick Him like so many pins and needles, 'our mind sharply rebukes us - thus' Ye witless *Gopis*! Don't Ye know that the beneficent Lord's heart is overflowing with love for the cattle and that the woods, in which the kine love to roam about, abound in all sorts of jungle growth, including thorns and thistles? Our remark is, 'but surely there are smooth alleys and foot-paths leading through the woods' exasperates our mind all the more and lo, it is ready with the quick retort. 'How is it, *Gopis*, ye are so undiscerning? The kine, ye should know, seldom keep to the beaten track'. But when the Lord is Argus-eyed and his vigilant and penetrating eyes can at once discover the thorns and avoid them! Is it not so? O impatient mind? It seems that Thou art blinded by love that dost not care to know the truth. 'This becoming observation is too much for this brabblor and it abuses us - right and left, saying. "I loathe ye. Ye are void of love for the Lord. Love smells sweet, but not in your nostrils! The Good Lord not only walks, but sometimes runs after the cattle, the *better* foot before. In so doing how can He possibly avoid the little rubs in His way?"

"O Lord! Our mind thus makes itself obnoxious and, owing to its humours, there is no love lost between us. Yet for Thy sake, we admit that we are hard-hearted, and Thy feet are soft and tender. In rubbing them against our hearts so often we have been careful enough not to hurt them at all, but it is possible that the very contact of our hard-hearts has so hardened Thy

feet that they persist in walking over thorns and yet are not hurt! Or very likely, Thy tender feet impart their own nature to every thing that comes into contact with them, and their bare touch renders even the hardest stones and pebbles soft and harmless! But then there are so many of us, who long to have a place beneath the protecting shelter of Thy blessed feet. With a covering of our solicituous hearts for Thy feet – though by no means a comfortable shoe – how can any thing possibly hurt Thee? But ah! We forget that the whole of Brindaban, even its humblest dust – not to speak of its dwellers – loves Thee. So it is possible that wherever Thou goest the dust of itself makes a soft bed for Thee to walk upon unhurt! Or it may be, that Thy very breath, as Thou walketh, blows each prickly thorn,

..... each straw, each little rub
Out of the path.”

“Towards the decline of the day as Thou returneth from the woods, it is partly due to Thy curls, that loosely yet so beautifully hang about Thy face, on account of which every thing about Thee is shrouded in mystery. Partly again, owing to a cloud of dust, raised by the hoofs of the returning cattle, that we are unable, in spite of our keen desire, to have a full glimpse of Thee. Even as it is, the shooting beams of Thy effulgent face reach us through the haze. They electrify our souls. We hanker after Thee, with all the vehemence and craving of our hearts. O Lord, hold Thy lovely devotees, in Thy loving embrace! Thy love is nothing, if not tantalizing. On Thy way, Thou would'st not even wait a while and let us, Thy thirsting maids, see Thee

face to face. It may be that after tarrying here and there in the woods, the whole live long day, Thou art impatient to get back to Yashoda and hide Thyself in her lap. Ah, the lap of one who would fain fondle Thee as her own *atma*. Then why not return earlier enough to let fond souls, mad after Thee, have an opportunity to commune with Thee, to their hearts' content. "Oh! To tease us and deny Thy communion⁴⁸ after creating in us false hopes, hardly fit in with Thy loving nature. If Thou wilt persist in this unmeaning, unnatural course, unworthy of a noble mind, we shall be justified in calling Thee a Shuffler."⁴⁹

"Dearest *deva*! Pray give up this shuffling and teasing. Grant this humble prayer of our soul, even the prayer for that quickening touch of Thy blessed feet that shall restore the peace of our heart. Aye, the feet that are the ornament of this world. Even gods like long Brahma have had to worship, the feet that satisfy the longings of all eager, submissive⁵⁰ and prayerful souls and bring comfort to persons in distress who meditate upon them." Valiant Lord!⁵¹ Pure and Immaculate! As

'The thirsty earth soaks up the rain
And drinks, and gapes for drink again,'

even so, we thirst for the nectar of Thy lips, the nectar that augments hearts' love for Thy sweet fellowship,⁵² it banishes all grief; works marvels through Thy flute. It so enriches the heart of persons who have acquired a relish for this ambrosial drink, that they would

not exchange it, even for the sovereignty of the whole world!"

"Dearest Friend! In the day time when Thou art out into the woods, on sporting excursions, a minute's⁵³ duration of Thy absence presses on us like an age.⁵⁴ Our joy knows no bounds when, on Thy return, we see Thy blessed countenance, the beauty of which is so charmingly enhanced by Thy wily curls⁵⁵ (the love-locks), that loosely hang about and act as a snare for entrapping souls. As we look on Thee intently, our flickering eyelids flap and obstruct Thy vision. O woe unto us! It is then that we find fault with their Maker, the Brahma, for imposing on us a superfluity. For, surely we cannot but regard their winking again and again as a hinderance! Brahma, indeed, must be void of sense in not transferring our unsteady eyelids to the gods, to whom it makes no difference, whether they have them or not. For, try as they may for thousands of years, yet they may not be blessed with Thy vision beatific, whereas we are fortunate enough to have it daily. So this transference would hardly be felt by them as a nuisance. It would relieve us of a great load on our minds, which, unhindered, would reveal in the constant contemplation of the ever, increasing beauty and grandeur of Thy glowing face, as we see it from day to day."

"All knowing, Eternal and Immutable Lord! Thou knowest the discontented state of our minds. No sooner did the loud, sweet-ringing notes of Thy charming flute catch our ears than we got out of our homes. Break-

ing loose from all restraints, and not minding the advice of our worldly relatives—husbands, sons, brothers, relations, friends and companions to the contrary, sought Thy holy presence in this wood. Yet, O trapper of souls,⁵⁶ who else could be so heartless, but, Thee? Who else, after enticing souls that have relinquished their all for Thy sake, their homes and everything that they own, would give them the slip. Thou alone doth at night time leave them to their fate in the wild woods?"

"O Friend! In spite of Thy fickleness we love Thee and can never for a moment forget Thee. The tentatling game of hide and seek,⁵⁷ Thou playeth with our souls. Thy making advances and consorting with them in solitude and thereby engendering love in our hearts for Thee. Thy loving glances, Thy genial face is all smiles, and, above all, is the mark of recognition. Thou hast out of Thy abundant grace conferred this on Lakshmi, who occupies the very centre of Thy heart.⁵⁸ All these *factors, primum mobile*, which continually dominate all our thoughts, create an intense and incessant longing in our souls. To meet Thee and keep Thee locked up, in the silent chamber of our yearning heart forever and forever, is indeed our goal."

"O Friend of friends! Thine advent is the harbinger of universal peace. It is to relieve the sufferings of ailing and sorrow-stricken souls, that Thou hast manifested Thyself in this care-worn world. Our hearts pant for Thee, and our souls are in a paroxysm of fever! Be not so ungenerous! Give us, Thy love-mad *Gopis*, with a liberal hand the diaphoretic that shall

abate the fever-heat of our maiden souls! Thou art our Physician; Thou alone knoweth the treatment that will have the desired effect and cure us of our malady."

"O Healer of our sick souls! Thou art our All-in-all. We can ill afford to part with Thy blessed feet. Our hearts, hard though they be, ought to have the privilege of accomodating them, and not the woods to which Thou hast betaken Thyself. Oh! Why tarry among pitiless stones and pebbles, which may possibly hurt Thy tender feet and not let our hearts embrace them, however gently? Worried as we are, it now rests with Thee to prolong or cut short our misery."

CHAPTER IV

END OF DARK NIGHT

The sweet strains of the sacred song of prayer, in which the feelings that are upper most in the hearts of the *Gopis* have their full play, come upon one's ear.

..... "like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets
Stealing and giving odour!"

The melting airs react upon the chastened heart and out of its fulness tears, such as angels weep, burst forth. As they chant their favourite song, their soul quivers. The electric waves of devotion pass on from heart to heart, swelling their feelings of love. Their yearning for His vision beatific, grows magnifying the poignancy of their grief, felt at their separation from Him! The warbling birds forget their trilling notes. All around is dead calm. The wheezing sound of the invisible and creeping wind is no more heard. The atmosphere is surcharged with grief. It seems as if the whole of creation is in travail, and the world is in its last gasp!

'The rose is sweetest washed with morning dew;
And love is loveliest when embalmed in tears.'

The cry still comes, "Lord! Why this difference! The prayer, so deep, so devout, does not go unheeded. It is a prayer like this that makes one feel the Lord's living presence." "After all, the *Gopis* are all love for

me ; their love is free from the grossest touch." So the Lord thinks. ' They are like the fine fresh lotus leaf, that requires to be delicately handled. The fiery ordeal is too much for them. They are wholly mine. I am theirs. It is all over with Eros, who has been worsted and vanquished. So let me now show myself to the *Gopi souls*, overborne with grief, and comfort them lest they give up the ghost in sheer despair ! "

Inner illumination does not come true attachment to the Lord does not spring up till the Arch-fiend, that holds sway over one's heart, is suppressed. This done and the repeated trials having developed the *ultra-mundane* godly nature of the *Gopis*, affection for Him springs up. Lo ! The B-neficent Lord, is all love and all Beauty.⁵⁹ Before Him the veritable cupid⁶⁰ lies low, conquered and confounded by His captivating charms. Much to the delight of the love-lorn *Gopi souls*, He manifests Himself among them ! No gorgeous gewgaws adorn His person. Barring a garment of golden hue and a wreath of flowers, which also are not without their purpose. The garment is the outer reflection (the *Aureata*) of Divine Enlightenment and the garland (*Pentaflours*) signifies obvious victory over Eros. The Lord is all smiles. Oh ! for the joy, that springs from the Lord's presence ! The lustre of His face dispels the melancholy gloom of the heart of the *Gopis*, even as fog is dispersed by the rising sun. Jubilation takes the place of anxiety and depression. Their lotus eyes are delighted to see the Lord put on His best looks. As a lifeless body, that comes into life again, is up on its

legs, even so the *Gopis* feel the return of the Promethean spark in their feeble frames from the Lord's quickening presence and stand up one and all before Him. Like the

'Triumphal arch, that fill'st the sky

When storms prepare to part,'

Or even as numerous flashes of lightning overlap and emerge out of a dark cloud⁶¹ that hovers on high, round the spacious firmament, the *Gopi souls* surround and embrace the Lord. They rejoice in Him and in their sweet moods, happy thoughts, that are the outcome of their fond hopes and earnest prayers, strike them. One of them is gratified to get hold of the Lord's blessed hand. Another triumphantly places her arm on His shoulders. A third takes delight in helping herself to the *mannu*, that drops from the blessed Lord's sweet lips. A fourth, whose heart is all but consumed by the burning pangs of separation does not rest satisfied unless the tranquilising touch of the gracious Lord's feet wins her over. It is the only sedative for afflicted souls that one can think of. A fifth, who stands enveloped in light, makes a show of her righteous indignation. She squeezes her fine lips and knits her brows like gathering storms. But her love for the Lord conquers her rage. All that she does is to aim innocently at Him a few piercing shafts of her side-glances, her high-strung, arched eyebrows serving the purpose of stretched bow and her twisted lips furnishing the requisite driving force. A sixth finds the Lord's face to be intensely interesting. She is rapt in scanning its outlines. Never for a moment does

she divert her attention there-from. Her fond spirit looks on so eagerly and intently and is not satiated even as the spirit of *Sadhus* that continually revels in worshipping the Lord's feet, still remains athirst. Yet a seventh deports Shri Krishna through the windows of her soul and locks Him up in the silent chamber of her heart and there revels with Him. Lo! She lets fall her eye lashes, like the *Yogis*, and is lost in ecstatic communion with the Lord. Her outward appearance bespeaking the joy, she must be feeling in her heart of hearts in her reunion with Him. It may be that in closing her eyes she means to prevent the Lord from escaping, believing that formerly He was at liberty to escape but now being locked up He cannot.

As redeemed souls, who have discovered the Lord, are freed from the torments⁶² of the work-a-day⁶³ world, even so the *Gopis* find relief from the tormenting pain of their separation from the Lord in the attainment of supreme bliss, resulting from God-vision! The immortal and immutable Lord, gracing the charmed circle of overjoyed⁶⁴ *Gopis*, looks the Supreme Being⁶⁵ with His inherent powers,⁶⁶ His attributes and perfections.

The Great Lord, the spouse of souls, takes all the *Gopis* to the enchanted ground on the banks of the Jamuna. There he knits their souls with Himself in sweet and loving communion, showering His grace on them in abundance! The zephyr, perfumed with the sweet odour of the blossoms of the jasmine⁶⁷ and the

62 ताप 63 संसार 64 शोक शुन्य 65 परम पुरुष 66 सत्यादि. शक्तियों से युक्त 67 कुन्द.

Celestial coral⁶⁸ is blowing all the while. Along with it the intoxicated bumble-bees are flitting about making themselves merry! The grandeur and the sublimity of the whole scene is heightened by the comforting rays, of the full moon that shines so clearly during the autumn months,⁶⁹ dispelling darkness. The little atoms of sparkling sand, reflecting the moon's silvery rays, make the ground appear as if it were star-spangled or bestrewn with pearls! It is a lovely bed of fine, crystal sand, beaten into so nice a shape by the surging waves of the Jamuna. Here the peace of God, which passeth understanding, reigns supreme, guarding the hearts and thoughts of those who love to loiter that way. The beatitude of God-vision frees the ailing hearts of the *Gopis* of that cankerworm of care, that had settled on their souls like an incubus; and so, blessed and beautified, they attain the utmost limit of their desires. This means that the final goal being reached, all their desires and appetites find their apt fulfilment, nay, culmination, in the Lord. He is all.⁷⁰ All solicitations then automatically cease. To express it in another way, the flight of desire and their resulting bliss have their peak point in the Lord. He being the Supreme Bliss, with His attainment all desires are of themselves extinguished. It is only a truism to say that desires receive their quietus when there is nothing more to desire for. The *Gopi souls* have found their Supreme Lord; He is their All-in-all, He is the Highest Goal of their affections; on achieving Him, nothing is left for them to hanker after.

With their scarves⁷¹ they improvise a fine, cushioned seat for the Good Lord to sit upon, dispensing with all formalities or pompous pageantry. For, the Supreme Lord is their best Friend and Mentor. He needs no triumphal arches or ostentatious display in His honour! The Great Lord, on whom the *yogieshwars* love to meditate in their heart of hearts, installs Himself in the assemblage of the *Gopis* on the seat, so gracefully improvised by them out of their heart's love. So seated Shri Krishna looks exceedingly handsome and lovely. It seems as if the dazzling charms of the three worlds, not being able to bear their forced separation from the Lord and with a view to better display themselves, have, for the nonce, concentrated themselves in His Person! The *Gopis* surround the Lord and worship Him, their heart's love, providing the salver; and sweet smiles, devotion, graceful demeanour, fervour, heart's homage, and reverence making up the requisite offerings, such as flowers, sandalwood, frankincense, water, *Chowrie*^{*72} and *Argha*^{**73} etc. They do homage to the Lord with clasped hands and becoming grace. They serve Him in various ways. Reverentially touching the Lord's hands and feet they can't resist the temptation of shampooing them, very gently. The more jovial among them make themselves merry with the Lord, making Him the target of their pin-

* Made of the tail of *Chamar* deer. ** A golden dish on which are placed fine garlands of flowers offerings of the *arghya* usually offered to a man whom one especially wants to honour as was carried by Drupadi in her *Swayamvara*.

71 ओढ़नी 72 चौरी 73 अर्घ्य .

pricks⁷⁴ and merry glances, intermixed with soft smiles. The occasional slight distortion of their eyebrows indicates that they have not yet completely forgotten their beau's late attitude towards them. There are daring souls, too, who want to place the Lord in a tight corner and pester Him with questions like this.

"Lord! There are souls who love only those who reciprocate their love or from whom they expect some return for their love; there are others who love without any desire for reciprocity; yet there are still those who keep themselves aloof from all, not caring to respond even to the love of those who dutifully serve them. Lord! just explain to us the *rationale* of all this apparent difference in temperaments. What impels souls to behave like this?"

The Lord knows what has prompted the *Gopi Souls* to raise this question before Him and He answers them thus. "O, dear ones!⁷⁵ Hear. Those who love from mercenary motives or expect some return for their love are mere worldlings. Theirs is a sort of trafficking in love, not true friendship, for self-interest⁷⁶ is their guiding principle and not *dharma*. They act merely on the policy of give-and-take. 'You pat my back caressingly and I will pat yours' is the motto of their life. A kind of mutual licking process, as is vogue among animals. The same selfish game is also followed by their counterparts of the '*Zoon politikon*' type. Blinded by self-interest, they would rather serve themselves and when they do befriend others, it is self-love alone that prompts them

to do so. It is not humanity ; it is not true love either, since it is self-seeking and throws all canons of *dharma* overboard. This sort of sordid bartering or profiteering in love is not conducive to real happiness at all and surely kills the finer and humaner instincts of the soul.

Those who love without any desire for reciprocity fall into two categories. First, those whose love is spontaneous⁷⁷ viz: father and mother, who continue to love their offspring all their lives, no matter if they get kicks for their pains. Their children, who are of their flesh and blood, may turn out to be undutiful and shun them, yet their inward love for them abates not a bit. It is ingrained in their very nature. For the sake of their progeny they would deny themselves comforts and suffer any amount of trouble, no matter if to feed them they have themselves sometimes to go without food and drink. Impelled by their parental instincts, they look first to the comfort of their children.

Secondly, there are sincere, loving and sympathetic souls,⁷⁸ true benefactors of their race, whose heart bleeds for humanity at large. They are the true *Mahatmas*, the saints, the guardian-angels of humanity. Not caring for name and fame, they would serve humanity without expecting any reward for their service. They are, by their very nature, loving, sympathetic and compassionate. Not to speak of rescuing a drowning man, they would even, impelled by their governing principles, rescue a scorpion from its peril, no matter if in so doing they are badly bitten by it. Selfless souls,

act from pure and highly religious motives and true felicity is their portion in life. Of them it can truly be said,

“Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the
Chords with might;
Smote the chords of self, that, trembling,
passed in music out of sight.”

Those, who keep others at arm's length, not caring to respond to their love, can be classified under four heads.

*Atmaram*⁷⁹ i.e., those who, being sovereigns of their own self, are always absorbed in communion with the Greater Self, such as *Yogis* and others of their category. Nothing can detract them from their true inward joy, yea, the joy of Divine communion. Whether their person is unknowingly clothed in rich draperies or in coarser garments, it matters all the same to them. A person comes and thrusts on the *Yogiraj* a luxurious *shawl* another comes and takes it away unasked. The action of the latter does not make the *Yogi* the least unhappy, nor does the gift of the former tickle his fancy and afford him abnormal gratification.¹ Mark the attitude

* Rather their absorption in the Lord and consequent self-forgetfulness is so complete that they don't know whether the wrapper they are wearing is a soft *Shawl* or a coarse piece of cloth, whether it is a valueless clod of earth, lying before them or a precious piece of gold and whether anybody has robbed them of anything they might have got with them. Among the narratives recorded in *Shrimad Bhagwat Purana* is one of Jar Bharat (*Jarta* signifying self-effacement) who had set up an ideal of true renunciation and had renounced the king's sceptre for the medicant's bowl.

of Jar Bharat⁸⁰ towards the wives of his brothers. The ladies used to starve him, yet he never expressed the least dissatisfaction, with their action and gratefully accepted as if it were a heavenly manna, the little food that he got from them.

(2) *Apat-kam*:-⁸¹ They are the fully satisfied souls, who by a life of self-denial and self-discipline, so train their desires that thoughts of self-indulgence never trouble them. Means of gratifying their desires may be at hand, yet owing to a sense of self-sufficiency, their mind is free from the excitement to indulge in them. It is common to undisciplined souls and 'puffed, reckless libertines, who 'tread the primrose path of dalliance.' They lack nothing and, therefore, desire nothing to complete their inward happiness.

(3) *Akritagnya*:-⁸² They are the ungrateful persons, who forget the benefit conferred on them by their benefactors or obliging friends and relatives. Far from requiting them, they do not even acknowledge their normal obligations to them.

..... 'Unjust to nature and himself

Is thoughtless, thankless, inconsistent man'

Ungracious in the extreme and actuated by a most ignoble feeling of ingratitude, he merits not the favours of Heaven.

(4). *Guru-Drohi*:-⁸³ Of the fourth order are those hard-hearted persons, who are positively hostile to their well-wishers or benefactors and bear ill-will towards them. Apart from betraying their interest, they feel no com-

punction even in trampling under foot those, whose love and friendship they have enjoyed. They do not even refrain from playing fast and loose with their best friends. One should beware of them as of a snake in the grass."

The good Lord has done with His reply. It is enough to cause some heart-searching in really thoughtful souls. But the *Gopis*, who have patiently listened to His interesting discourse, mean to turn the tables on Him. The unimpeachable Lord is being arraigned before the tribunal of His devotees, even His *Gopis*, first for his act of desertion primarily, - if desertion it is. Secondly for His failing to respond to their deep and fervid manifestations of love, at least not till their heart, owing to the strain upon it, has reached its breaking-point. The *Gopis* can't think of giving the Lord a *quid pro quo*. In matters of love '*lex talionis*' (the law of retaliation) is out of the question, it being opposed to all canons of true love. Moreover any counter action, if taken, only recoils on the soul. For is not the Lord the very Soul of our soul? These considerations apart, the Lord is much too dear to the *Gopi Souls* and in the exuberance of their love and in their beatitude, the real nature of the charge against their *Ami* slips out of their mind. It may be that lovers are blessed with short memories. So the *Gopis* resort to twitting their '*Deus Consort*' (Heavenly consort) however, indirectly, and take to arguing among themselves the question of the applicability to Him of the *sobriquet*, used in the reply that He has vouchsafed to their question. This is how they in discussing among themselves

the point in question, apparently reproach Him in their own loving way.

"The Lord is no doubt sovereign of his own self, but there is none greater than Him with whom He can commune. Yet He is not absorbed in His own Self, to the exclusion of others. Were He so, He would not admit us into His sweet communion and fellowship. So the first appellation, to wit *Atmaram*, does not suit Him in all respects."

"His self-sufficiency too is not apparent to us, for He in His sweet way wooes our souls and stealthily creeps into our hearts to win us over to Him and make us exclusively His. We yearn for Him, but He, too, yearns for us. So how can He be *Apathkam*?

We cannot call Him *Akritagnya* (ungrateful), for, He, in response to our deep longings and self-sacrifice for Him, delights our hearts by His soft smiles and the sweet notes of His flute,"

Whereupon all the maiden souls laughingly exclaim with one voice, "Then, He is a Crass *Guru-Drohi* (one who is hostile and cruel to one's patrons). His heart must be of stone, since He so mercilessly flung us aside, who wish well of Him, and betook Himself to the woods. A person much exalted in rank and rolling in wealth can hardly sympathise with the lot of the depressed poor, much less feel their pulse and know the heartache they suffer from. Our Lord, seated on high, is much too exalted to know the real sufferings of the down-trodden and depressed-souls."

On hearing these ill-becoming remarks the good Lord says, 'Ye *Gopis*! I am not a *Guru-Drohi*. My

life is centred in ye and yours in Me. Know that my heart is full of love and compassion. Do not blame or misjudge me. If I do not at the start solicit the solicitants, the reason is obvious. I know the heart-throbbings of my devotees, but my withdrawal from them is not without a purpose. It is the lack of need-be's, extreme necessities, that often makes the souls so solicitous. Even so, my withdrawal excites the yearning of aspiring souls and their fondness for Me becomes with them a regular passion, their thoughts being constantly turned towards Me. A poor man comes by a hidden treasure. So long as it is with him, he becomes often listless and indifferent to its uses and potentialities; but when by chance he loses it, he in his dreams thinks of it and of untold benefits that would have accrued to him by its retention and use. Even so, 'O *Gopis*,' I have seen how devotedly ye have worshipped Me and how your heart has yearned for Me when I made Myself invisible to Ye. For me, ye have broken the shackles of conventional religion, that kill the very soul of man; disregarded the so-called public opinion and the hard-and-fast, creed-bound injunctions of the ordained, yet inaptly called revealed text, in preference to the injunction of your own conscience; renounced your kith and kin and severed all the ties that bound ye to worldly people, not caring what they will think and say of ye. Since ye Love Me and are so dear to Me, because of your immense sacrifices, know that My action, too, was prompted by love. My object was that your thoughts and feelings, that are centered in Me, may become fixed and permanent, and that an

inextinguishable desire may be created in your souls for communion with Me. Though hidden and invisible, know that I have been equally solicitous of ye, canvassing (trying to bring about) your welfare. I have been closely following ye, wherever ye have gone, being always near ye. The state of your mind is not hidden from me. I love ye too well. Joking apart, ye ought not to misconstrue, much less resent, the step I had to take for your spiritual well-being. Blood is thicker than water and of all ties, the tie of home and family is much too sacred to disengage one's self from. Yet to befriend Me, ye have willingly done that, leaving your hearth and home and disentangling yourself from all entanglements simply for My sake. The action ye have taken is praiseworthy and not open to censure or slander. It is even saintlike.⁸⁴ Ye have laid me under an obligation, from which I cannot release Myself even till eternity. I may go on doing ye a good turn, yet it will be impossible to repay the debt I owe ye, unless ye yourself release Me from it. Kind as ye are to Me, I do hope that in this matter of My liability ye will treat Me, your humble debtor, magnanimously."

CHAPTER V

THE MAHARAS

The good Lord's sweet and soothing words, 'breathe such divine enchanting ravishment which purifies us, the *Gopi Souls*. Their mood, slightly ruffled as it is, is changed and they begin to smile. The Lord's presence and fellowship drive away the anguish,⁸⁵ generated by His separation; and their longing for Him no longer troubles them. The desperation having departed the *Gopis* join a regular feast of the soul.

Ras festival now commences. The Lord Himself provides it and the *Gopis* take part in it with a zest and enthusiasm all their own. The noblest of the *Gopis* are the ornament of their blessed sex. The maiden souls owning complete allegiance to their beloved Lord, follow His voice in all matters. They joyfully stand in a huge circle. Their hands linked to one another's. The *Yogmaya*, too, (the Goddess of Love Divine) is in attendance on the Lord and, in obedience to His commands, prepares the ground for the ecstatic Love-play.

An ideal time, an ideal place, and ideal surroundings are needed for ideal souls to indulge themselves in an ideal play. The *Yogmaya's* choice, is also the playful Lord's. It falls in the ideal spot, overlooking the pretty banks of the Jamuna, close to *Bansi-But*, in the midst of a grand forest scene! Its effect is heightened

by the light of the full moon*, playing upon it. It is an ideal bright weather, following the fantastic summer heat and rains, when -

'No mist obscures; nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain
Breaks the serene of Heaven,'

when even fortune with a view to confer good luck on the Lord's maids is merry, razing out 'the written troubles of the brain'; when sweet thoughts creep in the soul the heart's gaiety asserts itself, banishing all care and dullness out of it. The blessed *Yogamaya* gets ready a grand pavilion⁸⁶ for the festive occasion. It is no mean, improvised structure. Nature herself lends all her rich resources to make it worthy of the occasion.⁸⁷ Exceedingly charming is the display of pearls⁸⁸ diamonds,⁸⁹ rubies⁹⁰ sapphires,⁹¹ topazes,⁹² emeralds⁹³ and amethysts,⁹⁴ beneath the heavenly canopy resting on eighty-four (a number which signifies something more than what it stands for) pillars of gold, bearing sparkling

* The forest is our heart हृदयागार in which the milk of love divine flows to excess. The fine breast indicates its rising ground (Bank). A pure mind free from debasing passions and attuned to the Lord, is the Banyan-tree the blessed retreat, close to our Jamuna, where the Lord's voice—even the Song Divine is heard to advantage. The whole panorama is lit with 'Light' in abundance, and the-saintly souls listen and watch overhead, constitute the Lord's own 'Church' Invisible, to which He invites His dear ones for blessed communion with Him.

86 मंडप 87 रास 88 मुक्ता 89 हीरा 90 चुन्नी 91 नीलम
92 पुञ्जराज 93 हरी मणि 94 विंगत मणि.

leaves and fruits of purest green gems.⁹⁵ It is by no means, an ordinary life that

'finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks.

Sermons in stones and good in every thing.'

Even so it is with souls, gifted with God-vision, that can best appreciate the hidden charms of Nature, and where ordinary eyes, see dry leaves and bare fruits, true seers, gifted with the light of Nature find every thing sprinkled with rosy light, even the light of the Lord. And who can better claim this distinction than the blessed, beautified souls of *Gopis*? However, the *Yogamaya's* glorious display is no mean ostentation. With all that is best in her, She has rendered the place haunted as it is by the bumble-bee, simply superb. The pavillion is ready and the Lord graces it with His peerless devotees, 'the *paragons* of the world'. Separated from the Lord and wholly absorbed in His quest, the *Gopis* have been unmindful of everything pertaining to their person. It is little wonder, therefore, that they look a bit untidy, their whole toilet⁹⁶ being out of order.⁹⁷ The good Lord now sets it all right with his own hands, adorning one and all with the best of jewels that are to be found in *Yogamaya's* storehouse. So adorned and honoured by the Lord, their happy, blooming faces look like full-blown lotuses. The congregation of so many fair faces, enlivened by the rays of the full moon, gives the whole of Brindaban the appearance of a lake, full of melted gold, looking 'sparkling and bright in its liquid light'. For, it is the arena, even the playhouse of the Great lightsome Spirit, as the souls

can't be ready for blissful Divine communion unless clothed in light.

The glorious Omnific Lord Krishna, the Lord of Creation, multiplies Himself. He stands in a uniform relation to the *Gopis*. Each one of them is feeling His presence on her right and left and stands clasping His arms. The whole body thus forms a hallowed circle in which the Omnipresent Lord shines forth so beautifully and prominently. This signalises the commencement of the *Ras* Festival. He now showers His grace on them. Such is the mysterious and profound working of the Divine Spirit⁹⁸ among the *Gopis* that each one of them feels her beloved Krishna to be with her alone! So naturally their enthusiasm is at its height. Besides the Chief maiden soul,⁹⁹ the chosen eight* have by virtue of their qualifications, ever the right to be near the Lord. Prominence is also given to the names—all allegorical—of other *Gopis* as well from among the blessed sixteen thousand and millions of others who figure in the *Ras* Festival. The Lord in His universal aspect—to use a quaint expression, is called a 'Person of sixteen Theomorphic constituents'!¹⁰⁰ The figure 'sixteen'

*Lalita ललिता, Bisakha, बिशाखी Champakalata, चम्पकलता
Tungvidya तंम्बविद्या, Indulekha, इन्दुलेखा
Rangadevi रंगदेवी, Chitra चित्रा, and Sudevi सुदेवी
The names signifying eight-perfections अष्ट सिद्धि
which the current Mythology ascribe to progressive souls. The names are also taken to denote the eight Divine super-perfections necessarily associated with the God-head.

98 हरि के निगूढ प्रगाढ प्रचलित शक्ति का प्रभाव 99 प्रियाजी
100 शोडशात्मिक .

according to popular Theanthropism, signifies the elemental parts of all ordinary physical manifestations. Their forms can be counted by millions and sextillions.

Ras lit. means relish. The Love play brings forth different feelings and emotions. *Ras* therefore is the collective name for the feeling of love and its attendant emotions, such as kindness, compassion, ambition, laughter, etc., that sway the human heart or awaken fine, pleasing emotions in the soul. *Las* is practically the name for Vishnu's ecstasy; and its corresponding term *Ras*, too signifies the ecstatic delight in which the higher and purer impulses, to the entire exclusion or repression of the lower, predominate. In its most modernised sense, however *Ras* of course, has come to mean the innocent system of hymn-singing and dancing¹ in a circle. Such a group-dance, is in vogue in some parts of the country in which, persons of both sexes take part. The term, 'Ecstatic Love-play', conveys, however inadequately, the original and modern sense of the word *Ras*.

It is impossible to have an adequate conception of the full dimensions of the place for the great Lord's own *Ras*. But to extend or shorten the Love's dimensions depends on His own sweet will. The number of groves¹ alone in our Brindaban, that serve the purpose of recreation and rest, is no less than eighty-thousand, and the number of *Gopi souls* again, who take part in the Love-play, is according to one count, sixty-crores and, according to another three hundred crores. You enlarge or subdivide the aforesaid Theomorphic 'Ele-

mental parts' into eighty, their moods or phases running into thousands. Again, take the sanctified mind, coupled with the chastened five senses, and the field of their 'perceptions' extending over millions (crores) of objects—all appearing hallowed through the development of our 'ecstatic' sense—then you will have some idea of the bewildering numbers that figure in the description of the legendary *Ras*. But the details become still more numerous and confounding if we take into account an equally vast army of female attendants and maid-servants. They who wait upon the Lord and His devotees, and the sylvan goddesses, who with their instrumental music entertain the huge congregation. The whole of universe is centered in the Lord. He is the only *Purusha*. All the rest being (females) *Prikruti*. The idea perhaps underlying, the Love-play is to exclude none who cares to woo, win and wed the Lord. The rest can remain in the background or in the outer court as waiters! Moreover, the field of God's immense love extends over the wide world and Braja or Brindaban (our heart) is nothing if not an epitome of the whole world. The ecstatic Love-play acquires a new meaning if we understand it in this light.

Numerous are the musical instruments that turn out enchanting music, as the play goes on, and their utility deeply influences the minds of the players, to wit, the devotees. This cannot be questioned. Among the stringed instruments there are the monochord³ and the polychord, such as various kinds of flutes,⁴ guitars⁵ and

violins,⁶ the *Rabab*,⁷ the harp⁸ and the fiddle. Among the wind-instruments there are the flute,⁹ the fife,¹⁰ the conch-shell,¹¹ the pipe,¹² and the clarionet.¹³ Then there are the vibrating bars and vibrating surfaces, such as cymbals,¹⁴ bells,¹⁵ teber,¹⁶ Tambourine,¹⁷ drum,¹⁸ kettle-drum,¹⁹ timbrel,²⁰ castanet²¹ and musical glasses and the like. The list becomes truly formidable if we add to it the various instruments of music, lent for the occasion to the *Gopis* by the heavenly gods and goddesses.

- In fact the glories of the musical halls and musical shows of these days simply fade into insignificance before the divine musical display of *Ras Festival*!

Sweet is the music that comes out of things that are pressed into the service of the Lord. Everything consecrated to His service, by which criterion alone the utility of a thing is to be judged - be it ever so trifling - acquires a new meaning, a new force, and by its very fine touch galvanizes the devotee's soul. And when to the accompaniment of consecrated instruments, dedicated souls - whose whole life is one perpetual song - chant divine music, swelling the note of the Lord's praises, its effect on the assemblage of His own devotees, cannot but be magical. The heavens resound with its echoes and the angels covet the good fortune of the Lord's beloved devotees.

No two musical sounds, uttered by two different

6 ताऊस 7 रबाब 8 सारंगी 9 बिणु मुरली 10 मौहर 11 शंख
मुह, चंग 12 बांसुरी, मुरज मेरी 13 तुग्ई उपंग, नकीत, सारंग
सहनई काबुंद सुरमंदार, दुंदभी, 14 झांझ 15 घंटा 16 डफ, खंजरी
17 तानपूरा 18 ढोल, 19 नगारे पखुवाज, ढोलक मृदंग, खडताल;
20 चंग कचरा; 21 जलतरंग, नसतरंग खटका, डमरु.

persons are perfectly alike. The number of tunes, therefore, corresponds to the number of *Gopis*²² running into millions. But the classification of music follows the variations of tunes. So one cannot fix a definite limit for the number of *ragas* or musical notes entering into the composition of music. In the Divine Love-play—the *Maharasa*—the *Gopis* are supposed to strike millions of notes, the more prominent of them being 16000²³ the six *ragas* and thirty six *Raginis*. The various systems of music that are prevalent in other parts of the world to this day are no doubt mere crumbs or remnants of the manna that has chiefly dropped from Heaven for the *Gopis* to feed their souls!

Life moves in rotation of which no one knows the beginning or the end. Its centre is the Deity Himself. So in the Love-play, though the Omnipresence of the Deity is emphasized by representing Him to be present with each *Gopi Soul*, yet the central place is assigned to Shri Radha²⁴ and her Heavenly consort, the wedded pair that ranks first and foremost. The language of devotion apart, the necessary implication is that the Deity is not masculine alone, while the rest of the pairs, forming round them a series of concentric cir-

* A figure too significant to need an explanation, corresponding as it does, to the sixteen. 'Theomorphic' components and their thousands of phases (वृत्ति भेद) all comprising in sound numbers 'the Blessed Sixteen thousand' who espouse the Lord! **The *Bhagwat Purana* ignores this point, the Radha cult is of much later growth the seed-plot thereof being, however, in the *Bhagwat Puran* itself.

cles with their ever widening circumference, each double the size of the other. The presence of the Lord individually with each *Gopi Soul* is also due to the plain fact, that every one of them looks upon Him as her husband. He has loomed large in their prayers and they have taken a vow to wed Him. None likes to see her beloved Lord in another's embrace. With mutual jealousy and bickerings, if they were to be rampant among *Gopi Souls*, the Spiritual Festival cannot possibly be celebrated. So the good Lord makes each *Gopi soul* feel that He is in her embrace alone and in no other's.

It is the occasion of the blessed *Ras*. Millions of gods and goddesses, the immortal beings, of whom there are 33 crores who, (another enlargement of the Theomorphic 'elemental parts', representing the best and the purest of our impulses)--have heard the echoes of the *Maha-ras* proceeding from Brindaban and seated in *Bimans*-exalted planes indicative of their owners' privileged position, because of their soaring high and high. They arrive in hot haste and hover over the sky, ye, the horizon of our soul. Full of flush, the worshipful pantheon beat their 'kettle-drums announcing their arrival by their hallelujahs and shower flowers from above, over the blessed participants of the Love-play. These 'flowers' are the outcome of the heart's over-bursting pent up feelings, joyfully manifesting themselves in their 'condensed' state through the lachrymal gland in the eyes. The celestial singers²⁴ too, sing the

Lord's praises. Charminglly sweet and⁶ harmonious are the notes issuing from the flute of the Lord and from the *Vina*²⁵ (flute) of His coadjuter, adonised and adored One²⁶ whose heart beats in unison with the Lord's. The sylvan gods, too, play upon their instruments in concert. Perfect symphony is the result. The devotees, all in a state of ecstasy, coupled with their beloved worshipful Lord, dance to the accompaniment of music. The earth and the heavens resound with cries of hallelujah!²⁷ An ocean of bliss engulfs the whole of the congregation. All are besides themselves with joy. Their immersion in the Lord is complete. During the devotional dance their hair get dishevelled, but they are too forgetful of themselves to tie them up into a knot as before. Their scarfs²⁸ slide off and the strings of their stomachers²⁹ and laced-up stays get loosened. But their minds being taken up entirely with ultramundane thoughts, it does not occur to them that there is anything wrong with their person. Not to speak of the *Gopi Souls*, the members of their sex among the heavenly host—for, the immortal beings are accompanied by their better halves, all the more remarkable for their high-soaring faculties are in raptures, too. They cherish a desire to exchange places with the *Gopis*, only if it were possible for them to be reborn on the lower plane and dance with the beloved Lord hand-in-hand!

In short, the *Ras* is in full swing. The hand, foot, and waist ornaments of the *Gopis* in their devotional mood, dance with their beloved Lord, beating time.

They are so nicely attuned and chime so beautifully as to create an atmosphere of true felicity, in which there is hardly any room for *taedium Vitae*, the whole place appears like a veritable shrine of the Almighty. There is an air of purity all round resounding with heavenly music! Diverse and beautiful are the movements of their legs and limbs during the fine, celestial play. Now it is forward, now backward; now it is to the right, now to the left; now it is swirling, now slipping movement; now with one or both the arms resting akimbo, and now with arms extended above the head, make a slight curve; now it is an individual, now collective or charming circuit-dance. It is a dance in the Eternal Now.

Fair are the *Gopis*; Fairer still is the Lord. It looks as if the celestial circle,³⁰ makes up brilliant assemblage. It seems to be a fine necklace composed of white pearls and blue sapphires.³¹ It appears to be a ring of sporting clouds, interspersed with lightening flashes! A flood of light, scintillating through the beaming faces of the *Gopis*, is flooding Brindaban. The tendency of their ear-pendants, as the *Gopis* lead a pretty dance, is to bend themselves often and often in the direction of their faces, perhaps, to see how they look like during the devotional *Utsav*, to wit, the *Ras*! Faces do tell tales. They are only a reflection of our inner mind, yea, our inner conscience.³² Their place for the purpose of our parabolic description is assigned to the swinging pendulants.³³

Dancing and singing now proceed together to the

accompaniment of music and, presently, the three worlds resound with the echoes of sonorous '*Ta Ta Thai, Ta Ta Thai.*' The moon and the stars, of which it is said,

'There's is not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,'

forget their motion and music and become fixed in their orbits!*

The dark spots in the moon are suggestive of its chariot being driven by an antelope, so says the legend. Thus is its stillness due to the excessive fondness of the deer, yoked to its chariot, the music, of bewitching notes from the Lord's flute cast a spell over him, and thereby impede his course! The whole of creation, mobile and immobile out and out feels the marvellous effect of the divine chant and its tendency becomes the reverse of what it is. Brahma, who is the father of music, as of everything else, is simply non-plussed. Mahadeva, who is wholly absorbed in his austerities in his mountainous home, starts up. For, is there not something mysterious in *Maharas* to inspire even the greatest of austere meditative souls to make them forget their austerities and take to the path of *Bhakti* (devotion to the Lord)? Knowing that the stronger sex with his sterner instincts is debarred from entering the sacred circle of the Lord's blessed votaresses in the Love-play, Mahadeva, compelled by the overpowering urge of

*The mind which is likened to the moon deprived of its changeable mood, is simply 'tranced'! Some dark spots in us are inevitable, but they should not be allowed to impede the bright rays of the moon, that reflects the light of the sun of our mental horizon.

Maharas, proceeds to Brindaban in the guise of a *Gopi* soul, accompanied by his faithful consort Parbati!* The hoary ascetic, though looking sweet-and-twenty, young and pretty as a maiden bedecked for nuptials, is at once recognized. But the Lord sets the qualms of Mahadeva's conscience at rest. He allots to him a corner in the Holiest of holies to witness the *Maharas*. This corner which is at once christened *Gopishwar*³⁴ (seat of Ishwar in the person of a *Gopi*). A parable, is not without a moral. After all, it is the substance and not the form that appeals most to the Lord. He knows our motives and feelings and judges us accordingly. One need not, perhaps, wipe out his beard; if a woman's heart beats within him, he is sure to have free access to the Lord's Love-play and is welcome to woo and wed Him!

So under the good Lord's aegis, the rule of the heart and of the spirit have replaced the ruling passions, and rapturous music. This is helpful in communing with Him. It is going on in His own congregation of kindred, loving souls. It is a sort of conference divorced of discussions dry and lengthy, frothy and fruitless. It is a joyous union of hearts with a lot of merry-making and helpful conversations at intervals. The

* Human heart, attuned to the Lord, is like the mountain, the source of so many gushing springs of love divine, Parbati being the presiding goddess thereof, even the goddess of our inner tabernacle, outshining all Jeans and Helens, - a pure bent of mind being the greatest gift of God.

soul holds converse with the Oversoul. Nectar flows from the Lord's lips; His tongue drops manna. It is the Living Word that rejuvenates and not the word, buried in scriptures of the long, long dusty past. The *Gopi Souls* are—immensely delighted and feel a constant desire to embrace Him. Happy is the illumined soul that hears the silent whisperings of His love!

Here is fine instance of one such love making. In His flock of maiden souls the Lord thus addresses the Queen, who is typical of the rest: "O Dear! My own Mabel! Persons, who bear me great love and whom I love to call my companions,³⁵ call me Great. But thy companions,³⁶ yea, thy maids of honour, who, of course, belong to thy sex, applaud thee to the skies and call thee great. May I know wherein thy extolled greatness or superiority lies?"

The queenly soul enquires, "Humph! Do tell me, first, whether it is the greatness of stature, age or learning, or if it is conduct or achievement that matters."

The Lord affirms, "It is achievement alone by which one's greatness should be measured and judged."

"If that is the test", and she asks then, "do assure us, dear, what constitutes Thy greatest accomplishment."

The Lord says, "It is a matter of common knowledge that when Indra's rage had thrown whole of Braja, to wit, the Universe, into a veritable cataclysm, then to intercept the flood and save the people of Braja, thyself, of course, included, I had to lift the

great Goverdhan* up on my little finger—end for a full week! Well, I being the Saviour and Protector of all, should, as a matter of course, rank as the Greatest among the Great'.

The following is the queenly soul's sweet rejoinder, "If that is Thy greatest achievement, ~~then~~ Lord, surely my achievement must be still greater. For, am I not cheerfully bearing the very same Lifter of Goverdhan, flower-like, as an ornament of my heart?"

How beautiful, yet how true! It depends on one's

*The symbolic Gowardhan of the priests has nothing to do with the parabolic Govardan. Legend assigns to it a height of four Yojans, i. e. sixteen miles. The Lord is *Vishva-Roop* विश्वरूप, the vast Universe being in His own image, there being unity in diversity and diversity in unity. (The orbit of vision of some philosophers of other nations is confined to human beings alone, whereas the orbit of vision of ancient sages of hoary India extends to the universe in its entirety). The *Vishva-Roop* being *Sorashatmak* शोडशत्मक (a concordant being of sixteen 'Theomorphic' components, the immensity of the height of Govardhan is taken to correspond to the immensity of the *Vishva-Roop*. Govardhan in fact typifies the Universe, of which the main support is the Imminent Lord Himself, Govardhan—lifting being one of His Nitya नित्य, perpetual) *Leelas* and Braja-Brindaban being His *Nitya Dham* (Home Eternal). Apart from the 'Universal,' the Lord has to be considered in His 'individual' aspect. He is the Supporter of the 'Little World' within us, our own 'Govardhan' being the heart, the centre of our 'little world', in which the 'Milkers' of love and purity ever flourish and fructify, 'Seven', is so to say, the 'eternal' ever recurring number of days. Thus His *Leela* is being enacted in perpetuity!

own spiritual perceptions to realise the full force of this verity of verities, which in itself is sufficient to silence all criticism against the interesting personality of Shri Radha in Shri Krishna's *Leelas*.

Persons who speak slightly of the Lord's ecstatic Love-play should ponder over the profundity of the Spritual conceptions, with which the *Maharas* is replete. It is neither a dream, nor a fancy, nor an illusion of the mind. But the sober truth does not dawn upon us, unless we divest ourselves of our preconceived notions and prejudices. Then alone shall we develop our higher instincts and intuitions and thus grasp the meaning of what is clothed in a huge mass of metaphor and fine allegory. It is, then, that we shall be able to enter into the feelings of true, unsophisticated souls—the *Gopis*, and appreciate the depth, breadth and warmth of their love and devotion.

The outstanding fact in the ecstatic Love-play, that the Lord multiplies Himself to be present with His devotees everywhere, should be borne in mind. It is not a new revelation, nor is it a fact to be pooh-poohed. All prayerful souls know it too well. True communion is impossible without feeling the Lord's living presence. God is the Supreme Spirit and since He is omnipresent, true devotees, blessed with the gift of true devotion, and second sight, with their heart and soul solely consecrated to the Lord, are able to realise His presence in spirit. In the matter of multiplication of self or multipresence, the science of objective *yoga* has its own theory to advance. The possibility, however, of any coarser conception of things spiritual, drops out of the

sphere of subjective *yoga*, once we look at the *Maharas* in its true perspective!

It has been said above that the stronger sex, with whom might is right and who are, therefore the less prone to softer feelings, are not privileged to witness the ecstatic Love-play. His unrelenting nature and stronger instincts of the dogmatizing and dominating sex, are the very negation of love. Well, if this is so how can the gods from above witness the play and how can the Sylvan deities join it? The reply is that the gods (godly impulses) too through the overpowering effect of this superb drama, of emotions, to wit the *Ras*, forget for the time being their sterner predilections. With a woman's heart pulsating in them, they enjoy the Love's Drama singing hallelujahs and chanting the Lord's purest praises,³⁷ that do not corrupt the heart. Why pure? For, the Lord is Immaculate and His leelas (pastimes with the souls that are engaged in His sweet communion) replete as they are with finer feelings, tend to elevate and ennoble us only when we rise above our lower self. Our heart is cleansed from grosser passions. Yet there may be some among the gods, who cannot rise above the limitations of their stern reality and undergo the necessary mental transformation so as to become thoroughly tender, loving and womanly. They can, no doubt, realise the presence of the Lord, but cannot have any conception of His *Maharas* (sweet communion) with the *Gopi souls*. The latter

privilege is only vouchsafed to their 'better-halves' (fine, chaste, womanly instincts.)

In the ecstatic Love-play, dancing and singing take their turn with amusing *Conversazione* of the Spirit and loving communion with the Lord. All round there is real hearty jubilation. The sacred circle gracefully rotates round and round like the potter's wheel. The *Gopis* copy the Lord's voice that resounds in the recesses of their heart. The Lord applauds their singing. The higher the echoes of the tune, the deeper and greater is the applause. Shouts of *Wah-Wah* (good, very good) rend the sky and the response comes from all quarters. When the *Gopis* feel themselves tired, they refresh themselves, by resting their heads on the shoulders of their Beloved so close to them. With their breath they inhale the fine odour of His love and lo! their weariness subsides at once and they bloom with joy! The *Gopi souls*, who are nearest to the Lord, cheek by jowl, get from Him the gift of gifts. His own life-giving nectar he pours on them in fulfilment of their prayers as a mark of His grace. Some are not satisfied and crave for touch³ that transforms their hearts. All look upon the Lord as their real Heavenly Consort. Diverse are the amusements in which they, while singing, indulge themselves in. With their Groom's miraculous hands and arms round their neck, they feel elated, elevated, illumined and happy.

In this happy mood of feasting, the intoxicated bumble-bees direct from Elysium are the musicians. The *Gopi Souls* enjoy themselves in the happy company

of their beloved Lord. Their ecstatic dances and holiest chants thus become simply superb. The flowers so beautifully interwoven into their hair, drop out one by one; their faces become suffused with tiny drops of perspiration; their dishvelled locks and flower pendants—all make up a fine display of a heavenly sight for the gods to see.

As an innocent child plays with its own reflected image, even so the playful Lord sports, so to say, arm in arm and hand in hand with the *Gopi* souls. His loving glances, bountiful grace and soft smiles reflect themselves in the person and demeanour of His maidens. The *Gopis* with their eloquent eyes, florid, cheerful looks and longing and loving attitude³⁹ of their souls, please the Lord and sing His sweet praises. They being absorbed in ecstatic communion, the gracious Lord Himself looks to their comforts and needs, wiping with His own mysterious hand even the sweat of their faces and adjusting their garments. Who does not long to be in the Lord's embrace? And the wonder of it is that even emancipated souls witnessing the Lord's festival from above, long for the privileges of a *Gopi*! The magic spell of the Love-play makes the bumble-bee forget its music and the cuckoo its sweet notes! Hushed is the wind; the birds cease to chirp; and the 'Jamuna' stands still, all 'wavering' comes to an end! The moon and the stars cease to move out of their orbits; the divine warblings arresting their attention, and the night extends over a dura-

tion of six months.* This period is long enough to enable the *Gopi* souls to enjoy comfortably the Lord's sweet fellowship! The seasons, ordinarily subject to the revolution of the heavenly bodies, are equally with the latter subservient to the Lord. So they all, - the Indian year being divided into six seasons - wait upon the Lord on the occasion of the *Maharas*. But He accepts the services of only three of them, *viz*:- the Spring⁴⁰ the Summer⁴¹ and the Autumn.⁴² The rains and their necessary concomitant, the mud, render the rainy season⁴³ unsuitable for any entertainment in the open, the post-Autumn⁴⁴ and the Winter^{**45} months being similarly unsuitable on account of their intense cold. River excursion and water sports⁴⁶ are possible in the bright summer season. The Spring season being most suitable for an open excursion⁴⁷ in the various groves and

* A full ever-recurring year is the eternal Time Spirit's cycle, their number of days and nights therein being equal. The brighter half is all right, for during the daytime a person is not likely to go astray but if the darker half to suit our spiritual *Maharas* is turned into full Moon-lit-night, Full Moon being Krishna Himself, अकृष्ण विद्यु a pure bright mind which is also likened to the Moon being in His own image,) then our life will be one of 'perpetual Sunshine.'

** In love affairs knowledge (हेमन्त) is ordinarily at a discount, peace of mind (शिशिर) sometimes takes leave of us and all patience (प्रावृष) generally disappears. Selflessness (वसन्त) friendly actions निदाघ and Godliness शरद् are the governing features of the *Maharas*.

40 वसन्त 41 ग्रीष्म विहार 42 शरद् 43 प्रावृष 44 शिशिर
45 हेमन्त 46 जलविहार 47 वन विहार .

woods. So with the lovely Autumn, which has been chosen for the *Maharas* itself, the three seasons, make six months in all, which the Lord constitutes into a single night⁴⁸ for the *Maharas*.

As a colossal, frolicsome elephant, after the day's hard knock-up, rushes into water with his comrades, breaking all barriers, and sports with them, even so, does the soul-curing Lord. He tramples under foot the soulless injunctions prescribed by the scriptures of one's faith, and the so-called customs and usages⁴⁹ that hang like millstone round people's neck. They make a life of devotion and dedication impossible, The Lord leads the *Gopi souls* out after the holy exercise of *Maharas* for a dip in the Jamuna, the river of His grace. The Illustrious Lord has on His person a garland of choicest and purest flowers,⁵⁰ that abound in the woods. Their sweet scent which never goes undetected by the bumble-bees, the divine songsters, who ever rejoice in the Lord's company! So not wishing to stay behind, they leave their haunts in the woods, and follow the Lord, making fine music with their humming sound! Once in the current, the maidens give free vent to their heart's delight by splashing water from all directions on their fiance, whom they make the target of their soft smiles and loving glances. They in their turn, are given a thorough ducking by the Lord, to their immense enjoyment, the outpouring of His love and grace being too overwhelming for the devotees to make an adequate return. The immortal beings, seated in their heavenly planes⁵¹

48 ब्रह्म रात्री 49 लोक वेद की मर्यादा 50 बनमाला
51 पुष्पविमान .

shower flowers on their Lord God. Shri Krishna, being the soul of their souls so splendidly entertained His loving devotees, providing food for their reflection and opportunities for their loving communion with Himself. The intenser the flame, the greater is the chance of the condensed steam, because of the liquifaction of one's heart, seeking its outlet through the steamy opening of the eyes and dropping out in the shape of tiny *flowerets* only to greet the Lord with the heart's best offerings!

With the beloved Lord in her midst, even the brimful Jamuna cannot, out of joy, contain herself within her limits; so the consequent 'flooding' can best be imagined. The *Gopis* long for a boating excursion. There is, however, no sailing craft, worth the name, to be seen nearby. The Omniscient Lord knows the wishes of His devotees and promptly does the needful. Lo! There appears, emerging just above the surface of water where it meets the horizon, a sailing vessel advancing towards them! "There it comes." "There it comes", the *Gopis* exclaim with one voice. "There is, however, no pilot with it" the Lord says. But the *Gopis* are not going to be confounded in this way and they say. "Who else can be our good Pilot but Thee, O Thou, the steward of our life's steamship, sailing on the ocean of Eternity! Surely Thou hast power over wind and water, and ploughing the waves is the least of Thy *fortes*" "Well, then, come on, I will be your Pilot", so saying the Lord gets into the vessel with the *Gopis*.

There are three powers that are inherent in the

Lord: (1) His Incomprehensible Will-power;⁵² (2) His creative and sportive energy;⁵³ His power of manifesting Himself or displaying His nature and energy in diverse ways is at once instructive, but none the less mysterious on that account. The finite beings with their limited understanding, and (3) His power of working wonders for the good of His devotees.⁵⁴

As on the *Maharas*, through the working of His Incomprehensible will-power, millions of *Gopi* souls find room enough for themselves on the raised bank of the Jamuna. Even so through the working of the same power, the vessel, in which the Lord Himself, the Creator of millions and billions of worlds, sails, becomes accommodating enough for the innumerable who accompany Him. Verily, He is the heart and the soul of the Universe; even so our heart to us can a Universe be, only if we allow Him to be in sole possession of it.

With the Lord God as its Pilot, the vessel sails smoothly up and down the stream. Across the Jamuna they have a repetition of the ecstatic delight of the *Maharas*. On their return the vessel gets into midstream and begins to whirl round and round, and it seems as if it is going to sink to the bottom with its precious cargo. It is all the doing of the playful Lord. He has His own way of initiating the soul into the working of His Divine Nature; He by His actions, however mysterious, leads the soul on to the establishment of a closer relationship with Him. It is what the scriptures call His *Lila-Shakti* (Sportive energy). Water

rapidly gets into the steering vessel. The *Gopi* souls raise a hue and cry. The Lord tells them not to be afraid, but to exert themselves to the utmost to drain the water out. They do His bidding, but, finding their own efforts unavailing, approach Him with cries of distress. "Lord! Lord! We can hardly with our own unaided efforts keep the vessel afloat. It is rapidly filling up and is sure to take us to the bottom. It will not do for Thee to stand listlessly aloof. Pray, come to our rescue and save us from destruction!"

"But why don't ye swim across, leaving the vessel to its fate?" The interesting dialogue continues.

"Lord! We don't know how to swim. So our fate is hanging in the balance. Thou alone can save us from drowning."

"But what have ye given to your Pilot? Will He take ye across for nothing?"

"Lord! This is not the occasion for bantering. See, the vessel is cracking and is about to sink."

"Then, I must have my dues for ferrying ye across."

"What dues, Lord?"

"Well, all that ye have to do is to take a solemn vow of self-consecration, dedicating to me from this day unreservedly your person, your belongings and even your heart and soul."⁵⁵

"Lord! Have we ever withheld from Thee any thing that we call our own? Are not our belongings, our own person and certainly our heart and soul already

wholly Thine? Were it not so, could we have ever ventured out of our homes to meet Thee in response to Thy call spurning all that we own, even our husbands and relations, and casting to the four winds all codes of family honour, aye, our caste and public opinion."⁵⁶

"Very well. The risk is for them alone, who do not stick to their sacred vows. Since ye are so faithful in your allegiance to Me, your vessel can be carried safely across in no time."

So the dialogue ends. The vessel under the Lord's guidance resumes its normal course and the Heavenly Pilot, Who hath the steerage of their course of life in His hands, ferries them over in a moment. The fair tourists, fearing to face the dangers of a second trip, were the vessel to set sail again, hastily jump out of it on the rising ground in their harbour of peace,

In the Lord's celestial Brindaban everything is hallowed! The beloved Lord's spell is over it. Its sacred soil is bestrewn with the precious jewels,⁵⁷ the heavenly *chintamani* (cark-removing, desire-yielding pearls) that yield everything for the mere asking, in the heart's magnetic field, transformed as it is through the wonderful divine alchemy, all longings being godly, even without any clear, outward expression, find their apt-fulfilment through mere spiritual affinity with the bright, precious, lovely, magnetic 'pearls', that are to be found all round. Brindaban's stately trees, as also its lovely creepers, belong to the same category, the

heavenly elements entering into their composition enabling them to fulfil every desire⁵⁸ of its rightful claimants through a mere contact. Its maidens divine, call them *Gopis* if you please, are wonderful *Yoginis* possessed of extraordinary will-power. The *Gopis* require new garments, their previous ones being too wet through splashings in an extraordinary effort to keep their vessel afloat. Lo! The trees rain brand-new garments for them at a mere mental suggestion or the least indication of their wishes! Brinda another name for the *Yogamaya*, yea, the Goddess of Love,⁵⁹ extraordinary and angelic; that presides over their heart's seat of affections—provides for them a new toilet to beautify their soul! (Soul's language is always extra-ordinary and its meaning should be clearly grasped by readers.)

The *Gopi* souls are again in fine fettle and in their beloved Lord's company undertake an excursion through the woods. In the celestial Brindaban there are six woods, that take the name of the six seasons.* In each of the divine woods the season, after which it is named

* See analogic hints given in the forgoing footnotes. The ravings of a mad soul should be taken for what they are worth. Half the domain, or full domain, only it should be diversified with a picturesque variety of our own and should be at our disposal. Mad souls won't be satisfied with anything less than closest communion with One, in whose hands they have entrusted themselves and fullest enjoyment of His nectar, the Word that inspires and ennobles the heart. 'Brindaban' constitutes, so to say, the richest possible dowry bestowed on them by their own Groom, and they have full right to its enjoyment, to their hearts content.

58 दत्पना 59 तुलसी, अतुल्य प्रेम .

prevails throughout the year, and the fruits and flowers of the season naturally survive all the year round, their growth being perennial. In the wood of grove, named after the vernal season, i.e. *Vasant Kunj* (Spring grove), the *Gopi souls* witness a phenomenon, which is worth recording here, because of the reflection it implies for the modern world with its women suffragettes constantly clamouring for self-ascendency. The *Gopis* notice hundreds of male parrots perching on a fine tree in the Spring grove. Female parrots, too, arrive upon the scene and want to deprive them of their exclusive monopoly, But the gentlemen birds would not willingly forego their claim to the tree of their choice. "Don't ye know that the tree is ours and we have prior right to it?" They say!

"What! Ye *Juffers*! Ye should know that it is our blessed Lady Superior, the Fairest of the fair, who rules the whole of Brindaban! How dare ye dispute her sovereignty? We belong to her blessed sex and surely our right is superior to yours," so saying the second lot forcibly turns out the first, their strongest weapon being, of course, their bills!

The incident—at best a parable—illustrates the homily as to who shall want to rule the roost in all matters. Apart from the social change, the fact is there that, try as you may, you can't avoid a petticoat government in your own household!

Besides the six groves named after the seasons, there are numerous others, which serve as a sort of retreat for retiring souls. Aye, individual maidens to revel in

the sweet company of their beloved Lord betake themselves to retreats that are the very picture of true beauty. Their veil is unremoved.' In them everything is conducive to a solemn and sacred communion with the Lord of Maidens. Therein the maidens have themselves set up beautiful mansions. These are sylvan temples of true worship—of their beloved Lord. To these temples, the minds of the *Gopis* have helped to impart a lustre, best in accord with their own spiritual tastes and inclinations. For instance, there is the sylvan Mansion of Temple of Love⁶⁰ of which true affection⁶¹ constitutes the rampart⁶² or outer walls; true attachment serves the purpose of a balcony;⁶³ and the Lord's praises that of a parapet.⁶⁴ the spirit of service⁶⁵ make up the want of gates; compassion⁶⁶ forms the support beneath the rafters, ardour⁶⁷ stands for square seats at the entrance gates,⁶⁸ singing of the Lord's name constitutes the doors and windows,⁶⁹ whose frames consists of loving attitude of the soul,⁷⁰ kindness supplying the needs for nails!⁷¹ Within the beautiful Mansion the various apartments are made up of Devotion to the Lord,⁷² their wall, of fervour,⁷³ and arches of salvation,⁷⁴ sweet speech constituting the gauze, covering up the ventilaters!⁷⁵ The standard of righteousness⁷⁶ and flags of love⁷⁷ are flying high over the Mansion! The upper

60 प्रेम निकुंज 61 प्रीति 62 पर बोटा 63 मोह की मुङ्गेली
64 मरगोल 65 दास्य भाव का द्वार 66 दया के द्वार 67 चाह की
68 चौखंडी 69 वीरतेन के किराड़ 70 चितवन की चौखट 71 कृपा
की कील 72 भक्ति के भवन 73 भाव की भीत 74 मोक्ष की महारात्र
75 वचन जाल की जाली 76 धर्म की ध्वजा 77 प्रेम की पताका.

storeys resting on strong pillars of affections⁷⁸ are composed of true bliss! Bedsteads of true affection,⁷⁹ having legs of love,⁸⁰ twine⁸¹ of morality⁸² and bed-sheets of true attachment⁸³ are adorning the rooms of this Heavenly Mansion!

The same description *inter alia* applies to the other sylvan mansions, set up by the maidens, such as the flower mansion, the pearl mansion, the drapery mansion, etc., with this difference that they derive their distinctive features from the typical varieties of the emblems their names connote.

Wonderful is the Great Lord and more wonderful are His doings. Any description of His benefactions will of course be imperfect without taking into account the world's finest and richest productions and their immense varieties that go to make a heaven of this toiling world. His Love-play, whether in the outer or in the inner sphere of the soul, comprises of all that is fine, beautiful and worth living for in this world. The names of the various fine groves and mansions - too numerous to mention - are only emblematic. Their description, however faint and insufficient, gives one an idea of the vast and varied storehouse of His Love!

The aim of the *Gopi souls* is to live, to give and to rejoice in the Lord, their Beloved. Inspired by their loving communion with Him, they feel themselves quite happy. The Lord, Who is All-love, fondles the soul and a state of exaltation supervens! The allocation of sepa-

78 अद्वाद की अटारी 79 प्रीती की पलंग 80 प्रेम के पाये
81 निवार 82 नीति 83 चाह की चदरी.

rate groves and mansions to individual *Gopi* souls only means, that the Lord deals directly with individual souls. They look upon Him as their own, even as their *Deus Consort*. It is He to whom they are wedded for Eternity.

But in the Heavenly Brindaban, the mansion *par excellence*, the cynosure of all the souls, is the one set up by the Queen of maidens, of Highest Heaven¹ and Heaven's Lord, namely, Shri Radha. It is the *Nikunj Bhuvan* or *Nikunj Mahal*. The sylvan palace, situated in the midst of the most secluded and picturesque surroundings is known as the Saffron Grove. It simply defies description! (In the phraseology of mad souls 'Saffron'² is only indicative of bright, blooming conscience, the gold colour of saffron signifying knowledge, Riches of the Spirit, Happiness and Innocence.) Nice is the arrangement all round, effected here under the directions of Brinda, admittedly the Lady Chamberlain of the Lord's Household. Under her superintendence the inspired soul's and the condescending Oversoul's affairs in Brindaban are nicely arranged! Here sweet odours, proceeding from beds of saffron and numerous beds of fine fragrant flowers of all shades and hues, permeate the whole atmosphere. The whole mansion is flowery. It is the flower-emblem of Divine Love—that cements the union between the soul and the Oversoul! So the great-Immortal Wooer and the wooed immortal Queen-Consort are robed in flowers. By virtue of an everlasting compact between them, do they hold communion in a veritable bower of bliss.

Their entire bed down to the dais is composed of flowers. What else could be more conducive to Divine Communion? Perfect love rules here. Ah! Before this happiest consummation, so devoutly wished for by every wooed soul longing for the Lord's loving embrace, what is salvation? It is the most despised thing among the sweepings of the streets of Brindaban! None cares for it. The true votaries of Brindaban pray not, "Say unto my soul, I am Thy salvation", but her heart's constant longing ever is, "Say unto my soul, I am thy All-in-all, ever ready to embrace thee as My own and to wed thee."

Not the Queen-consort alone, but the other *Gopi souls* as well, solely wedded to the Lord live a consecrated life, enjoy the same blissful communion in their own respective spheres - aye, in their own groves and mansions. Happy in the embrace of their Beloved, Omnipresent Lord, Who in His own loving way ministers to the needs of His devotees, doing their bidding, ravishing their hearts and rejoices with them!

The long, blissful, grand opera of God's own worshipful Maids is about to reach its *finale*. The good Lord, true to His word,⁸⁷ has met the wishes of His devotees and helped them in the fulfilment of their sacred vows. So the curtain is about to drop on the Love-play.

The birds commence their early morning chant. There is stir and bustle all round. All come out of their respective mansions arm-in-arm, with their beloved Lord. A chorus of hallelujah, *Jai ho, Jai ho*

(Glory be to the Lord) is heard on all sides. Through deeper communion with their beloved Lord the joyful maiden souls have derived sufficient inspiration to resume their normal activities. They are 'as full of spirit as the month of May' and with the Well-meaning Lord's permission, the dutiful *Yogamaya* transports them much against their own wishes to the spheres of their daily toil. Thus, in the mortification of the flesh through the soul's devout communion with Himself, the Immaculate Lord chastises Eros. The latter being unable to point out a single flaw in the Lord's dealings with the *Gopi* Souls, lies prostrate, defeated before Him.

The story of the ecstatic Love-play is no doubt extra-ordinary. Even that tried soul, the kingly Parikshat questions Sukhdeva Muni, the narrator of the *Bhagwat Purana*, "O wise one! When the Lord makes Himself manifest to establish righteousness and to destroy evil, how in view of the extra-ordinary language and equally extraordinary ways of the Lord, that are seemingly against sanctified usages and customs, shall we interpret His relations with the maidens? When He is self-satisfied,⁸⁸ one may as well ask, what need is there for Him to so love His creatures and to establish the deepest intimacy with individual souls?"

Sukhdeva Muni explains, 'Good Sir! Your doubts here are out of place. There is nothing extraordinary in God's relations with the soul. If the worldly customs and usages are sacred and of His making, the devout

soul's relations[•] with Him, who is the Supreme Spirit, the Holiest of the holy, are much more sacred and inviolate. True, sincere devotees never question the priority of His claim to our love. In the allocation of our heart's affections we have to place Him first and foremost, above all our earthly relations."

God is All Love. The whole creation is an outcome of His Divine love. If Divine love **must** fulfil its functions, how can He, Who is even Love personified, cease to love us in His own godly way? He is no doubt self-satisfied. But are we not all His own selves? Is He not imminent in us? And would you dare deny His immanence in His well-beloved *Gopi* souls? Being the very Self of their self, how could His relationship with the maidens be misconstrued? They may have their earthly relations as well but He is immanent in them, too. But the relationship in which they, we and all stand to the Lord is the only real and abiding relation. Earthly relations might and do forsake us, but not so the good Lord. He looks upon us as His own self. Carnality is the very negation of spiritual relationship. There is nothing carnal in His relationship with-souls, for He is the Lord of Spirit and the very Anteros, Who will never tolerate Eros.

CONCLUSION

This Love-play is not at all meant for the wrong-minded persons; whose moral views are perverted, who are inclined to turn the things of the Spirit to their own advantage. They who do not look upon their Lord God as their hearts' Wooer, will derive little benefit from its study. It is meant for the privileged few; whose heart beats in unison with their Lord's; who have a true *Gopi* spirit⁸⁹ in them, with its attendant maidenly feelings, rich intuitions and finer womanly instincts. Others are sure to miss the soul of this Love-play, so grand, and so beautiful of ecstatic delight! Any person, who cares to witness the enactment of this Mystery play in the sacred groves and shrines of Brindaban by innocent children of Brijā, assisted by their devout elders, cannot but feel the thrill that can come only, if he or she be so inclined, through loving communion with the Ravisher of our heart, our All-in-all. And the inspiration that He is sure to vouchsafe cannot but serve to strengthen one's faith in Him and draw closer the ties of affection, that bind one to Him, Who often steals a march over us in our silent moments and intensifies our longing for His loving embrace!

This Mystery-Play is nothing, if not an object lesson to us, to sanctify our passions and to dedicate our entire self to Him. It does often happen, in the life of some of us, when His call comes to us and that call

has to be obeyed even at the risk of losing our earthly relations, best friends, our belongings and all that we hold precious, with which in our worldly mood it is so difficult to part. In the matter of the sacred call an entire loving submission to His will, we will have even to disregard public opinion and set at naught the injunctions of the sacred scriptures, so often flouted in our face, if they do not countenance the action that we take in obedience to our Lord's wishes clearly expressed through our Inner Voice. The text "Renounce all credal Isms and take My shelter"⁹⁰ should indelibly be impressed on our hearts and carried out literally. It is the keynote of the *Maharas*.

When Heaven's voice is within us—the path of truth—is clear; let us not pause to consider the pros and cons. Let us follow it manfully. The Lord will surely back us up. "What will the people say?" "What will so and so say?" is the cry of a weakling, a coward and not of a devotee. We have nothing to fear when the Lord is near—nearer than the very eyelashes.

Be thou, O devotee, even the humblest of the humble and the lowliest of the lowly. Consider thyself as the dust of this world. Ever bear in mind the simple fact that if His bountiful grace, too often showered on thee, makes thee self-conceited, thou art sure to forfeit thy claim to His love and His vision beatific. For the Lord to reclaim these as His own, thou must sufficiently repent for thy folly and thoroughly purge thy heart of all dross. All the same if thou art true

to thy faith in the good Lord, He will be still with thee, comforting thee in thy sore affliction and guide thy footsteps to the true goal.

The ordeal may be the severest possible, but do not thou, O true devotee, lose heart. Be thou full of faith. Follow Him ever doggedly and thou shalt surely find thyself in His loving embrace.

Sincerity is the root of all worship. Remember that the Lord is Truth and no true relationship with Him is possible if we are not sincere in all our thoughts, words, pledges, prayers and actions. So let us not for a moment try to hide our faults and failings from the Lord. Let us cast off veil like the *Gopis* of old and appear before Him stark naked, divested of (the cloak of hypocrisy), and with our hands off all the fibs and fopperies! Mark the significance of His Cap-relieving⁹¹ episode (the *Leela*, illustrative of impediments to Divine communion). The legend About Shri Amarnath, (the God of Immortals) requiring all aspirants after His vision to divest themselves of their outer garments (even garments of theatricality and egotism) before entering His Shrine, the Holiest of the Holy. So does the Bible enjoins when it says, "Come ye out naked to meet the naked Bridegroom." Only remember that aspirants in the former case are women-souls alone, who look upon the Lord as their Wooer, their real Groom!

Let us make Him our Sheet-anchor, even our harbour of refuge. Let Him safely guide the frail bark of

our life through winds and storms and through the Sheals and Quicksands of this world-ocean. If to lighten our bark and to prevent it from sinking to the lowest depth, from which no salvage is at all possible, we are asked to get rid of our finest treasures, which we consider to be an encumbrance. Let us not hesitate to do His bidding. Always spurning the fatal hesitancy mood in our dealings with the Lord.

Remember Lord is near at hand. Why let thy mind search for Him in the far-off heavens? Do we think that our God has left us in the lurch? His sweet word of assurance whispered in our soul, ought to suffice for us. Let us seek Him in the sacred grove, the silent chamber of our heart. Let us rest assured, in so doing. Disappointment, dejection and depression do not countenance a Lover.

Consider every conceivable object as sacred and the world the sacred shrine. The scriptures are not the sole repositories of His secret. The trees, the plants, the birds, the beasts, the starry firmaments and the *tena prime*, all are sanctified by His touch and bear His fine and beautiful impress. They are by no means trifling sources of inspiration for receptive souls.

Dancing and music are not disparaged if they are done by veritable persons of sterling worth. Let down all thy laws of decency in the *Jamuna* of His love and grace. Ecstatic fervour knows of no such laws. It is all right if we dance in the Lord's presence and to the Lord's tune.

The brotherhood of souls knows of no caste. In Him all are one. Since the Purusha (Supreme Being)

is one, all else being the fair sex to be wooed and wed by the Lord. The dogmatist who asserts that women are *Sudras* perhaps, forgets that he, too, belongs to the same category! If woman is a *Sudra*, then before the Lord all are *Sudras*. Once we place ourself in the position of a woman, we will surely look upon her as our own sister and never dare take any liberty with her. Has not the Lord Himself exalted woman to the highest rank, the rank of His Spouse? It is strange that a woman should question woman's rights!

The *Jeevas* (Sentient beings) are the playthings of the Great Player.⁹² He leads and they dance to His tune. To say that the *Gopis* (maiden souls) are His life-breath and, therefore, dear to Him, is an axiomatic truth. The round figure 3,000 millions (300 crores) is by no means puzzling. If anything, it is an underestimate.

Hunger for the Lord as the *Gopis* did. This is the Eternal prayer of the *Gopi*. It is the upshot of the whole play. Let our whole life be a life of incessant prayer. Let us sing His holiest songs. Remember the stage of beatitude cannot be reached unless one becomes one with the Lord in all His holy endeavours (*Leelas*). Hankering, coupled with self-consecration will bring us nearer the goal. Only let us not forget that His sweet smiles are worth very much more than a sacrifice of all that we hold dear.

Above all, that *Gaur-Shyam*—the two immortal names typify the virgin soul and the Immaculate Over-Soul

Looked at in another light, they represent the visible and the invisible—the two different aspects of one and the same Lord. It is the brighter Nature, the visible aspect of the Lord that appeals most to ordinary mortals. It is little wonder, therefore, that all Vaishnavas pour out their heart's adoration at the blessed feet of Shri Radha, their worshipful Deity. We are all part of *Prakirti* (Nature), which is as full of potentiality as the Lord Himself, Who is immanent in it. It is a stupid science which says *Prakirti* is soulless! Its unity and kinship of Nature is the newest discovery of the New Science. The trees, the plants, the stones, the sentient and the so called insentient beings are all co-partners in the Lord's Kingdom. If the much-boasted and so-called rational theism lacks the impulse and the beauty of true devout Vaishnavism, pray, call not the latter by any heinous name. For, every creed has its rational basis. Their professors and adherents may or may not know it. And the Lord of Dispensations, Who suffers them to survive and outlive the onslaught of ages, is the better judge of what is really rational. Moreover, who knows whether the beloved Lord would like to espouse one who gloats over his heartless rationalism and his long beard and moustache, as if there were an intimate connection between the two, or the clean-shaven Vaishnava. He also is a theist of theists—who has the spirit and the passionate attachment of a modest maiden?

Here are a few of the fundamental facts. There are still many more, that one can glean from the Love-play. In fact, every verse of this true Veda (for,

Shrimad Bhagwat Purana is called the fifth Veda¹ is replete with some sort of lesson for the learner. One who stands in *statu pupilaris* to the All-loving Lord, it is needless for him to traverse the same ground or make further attempts at a critical analysis.

In the Love-play there is sufficient food for the aspiring soul to set one athinking. Those who are engaged in His quest can't do without it. One cannot imagine any better or a higher ideal for vivid realisation of God. Let us remember that the purest pearls of the highest price can't be had without diving deep. In wooing the Lord, let us long to be one of the ideal milkmaids of Brija. Who else can woo the Lord better and at the same time be so patient and dogged in His search? Oh, why consider it derogatory to roll in the dust, that bears His impress and that of His devotees? A bare touch of the feet of the true devotees is said to illumine the innocent soul. Let us not hesitate to seek illumination from all sources. Let us live to learn, to be faithful and true! God will surely bless us!! Let us Love like the *Gopis* and the Lord is sure to tend his flock!!!

FAITH OF NAVAVIDHAN

God—We believe that God is one, that He is infinite and perfect, almighty, all-wise, all-merciful, all-holy all-blissful, eternal and omnipresent, our Creator, Father, Guide, Judge and Saviour.

Soul—We believe that the soul is immortal and eternally progressive.

Moral Law—We believe in God's moral law as revealed through the commandment of conscience, enjoining perfect righteousness in all things. We believe that we are accountable to God for the faithful discharge of our manifold duties, and that we shall be judged and rewarded and punished for our virtues and vices here and hereafter.

Religion of Harmony—We believe in the Church Universal, which is the repository of all ancient wisdom and the receptacle of modern science, which recognises in all prophets and saints a harmony, in all scriptures a unity and through all dispensations a continuity, which abjures all that separates and divides, and always magnifies unity and peace, which harmonises reason and faith, *yoga and bhakti*, asceticism and social duty in their highest forms, and which shall make of all nations and sects one kingdom and one family in the fulness of time.

Inspiration—We believe in natural inspiration, general and special, and in providence, general and special.

Scriptures—We accept and revere the scriptures, so far as they are the records of wisdom and devotion and piety of inspired geniuses and of the dealings of God's special providence in the salvation of nations, of which records only the spirit is God's but the letter man's.

Prophets—We accept and revere the world's prophets and saints, so far as they embody and reflect the different elements of Divine character, and set forth the higher ideals of life for the instruction and sanctification of all the world. We revere and love and try to follow all that is divine in them and to assimilate it to our soul, making what is theirs and God's ours.

Synopsis—Our creed is the science of God, which enlighteneth all; our gospel, the love of God which saveth all; our heaven is life in God, which is accessible to all; our Church, the invisible kingdom of God, in which is all truth, all love, all holiness.

Nava Samhita

Keshub Chunder Sen.

